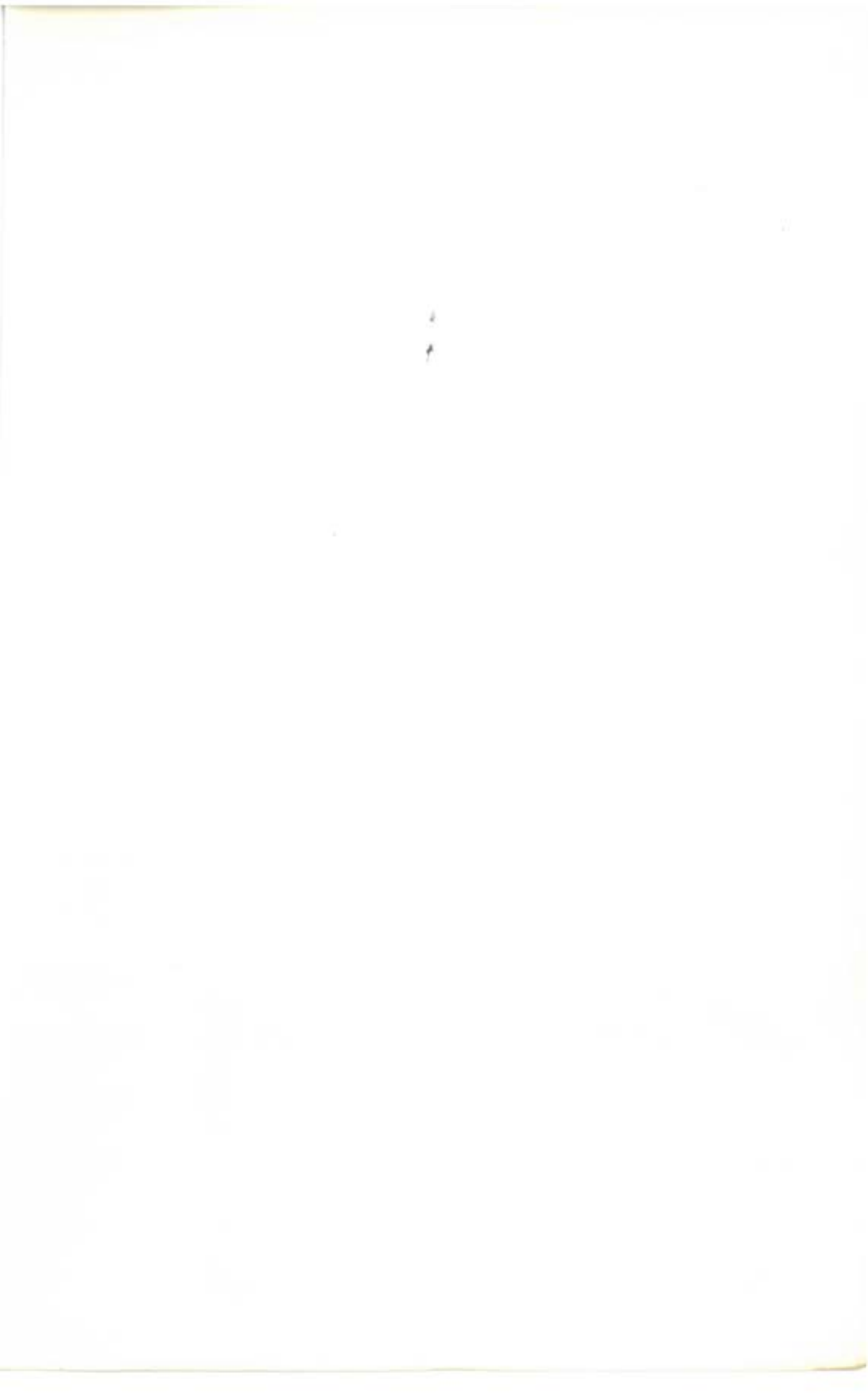


God's Hand Upon My Life



Autobiography by
Abram J. Friesen



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202 - 31955 Old Yale Road
Clearbrook, B.C., Canada
V2T 4N1
859-9308

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FORWARD

If it were possible for me to obtain a manuscript or a book written by my father, grandfather or greatgrandfather, I would be willing to pay any price for it, and would keep it as my greatest treasure. But sad to say, "There is none!" Often I have wished I knew more about my roots, but there was no one to tell me about them.

All I have in my possession that comes from my past is a little booklet, with fifteen 3 x 6 inch pages, with a maroon plastic cover. My grandfather Friesen made it and wrote his name on the inside cover. He wrote: "This book belongs to Peter Friesen in Ebenfeld, February 8th, 1887."

In this book my father has written the birth dates of his parents (1832 and 1837), the year of their wedding (1857) and the birth dates and deaths in their family. Then my father wrote the date of his wedding (December 4, 1894) as well as the birth dates and deaths of their children, of which I am number nine, and also the birth dates of the three boys who followed me. In the middle of the booklet father has written the birthdays of his oldest brother Peter's family. They had two boys and two girls.

Other pages contain a list of his business transactions. Examples of these are how much money he borrowed from Mr. Enns, how much wheat he sold to Mr. Rogalsky, how much wheat he brought to the flour mill in Halbstadt (usually around thirty-two pud and there are forty pounds in a pud), or what articles he should bring along from the city Slavgorad for the Sudermans or the Klassens, etc.

I treasure this little booklet greatly, because I remember that my father used it many, many times. It could always be found in the top drawer of our living room dresser. With all its handling over these ninety-nine years, it is still intact; all the pages are still in and three pages are still bare. Other pages are written upon in crisscross fashion (so you can hardly make out what is written), in times when paper was not available.

In thinking about our present and future generations, I feel it is important for us to leave a

legacy behind, to show where we came from, what kinds of battles for existence we endured, how we made our living or how we served God and our fellow man.

My dear wife Katie and our two daughters have encouraged, and also urged me at times, to write my life story, so that they, their children and grandchildren could read it and learn about their forefathers, and see how, at times, we have struggled through life.

Of our family of twelve, only two brothers are left. My dear brother Dietrich and his family live in Fresno, California and I live in Clearbrook, British Columbia.

We feel that telling the story of my life as a single, and also relating our short romance and stories of our life together is worthwhile, because we most certainly have felt God's hand upon our life in a special way.

Our prayer to God is that all those who read this book will be touched and encouraged to walk the road which leads to everlasting life.

Abram J. Friesen

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I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to our daughter Renetta Helen for her help during the course of the writing of this book.

Her skill in rephrasing some of the sentences has been most helpful. Her gracious spirit and patience have added a significant dimension to the manuscript as well.

I am very grateful for having had the opportunity as author, husband and father, to work together with my wife and two daughters.

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my dear, loyal wife and to our two daughters, Elizabeth Ann and Renetta Helen. Katie has done her best to make the atmosphere of our home beautiful and quiet for the writing of this book. I am grateful to her for this. I am also grateful to her and to my daughters for their encouragement and constructive criticism.

Renetta has typed the manuscript into the computer. Elizabeth Ann has helped us with the proofreading. Renetta completed the editing of the book and together as a family we got it ready for publishing.

I am very indebted to my family for their support and encouragement whenever I needed it.



The author at nineteen leaving Russia in October, 1926

THE FRIESEN ORIGIN

Ever since my parents died I have had the longing to know more about my background. I have often wished that I had asked more questions about my parents forefathers. It would still have been better if my parents or forefathers had left some manuscripts or information about themselves behind, which would give me information about their lives. I would like answers for questions like:

Where did our forefathers live?

In what city or country?

How did they make their living? (in farming or raising cattle and sheep, or did they have a trade or business of some kind)?

Since my father died when I was only 14, and my mother, older brothers and sisters have also died, I have no one left to go to with my questions. But I remember some of the things that father told us, and I will relate these as I write my memoirs.

I do remember my grandparents from my mother's side, the Johann Kroekers. They too will be mentioned as I go on with my story.

WHERE DID THE FRIESENS ORIGINATE

Since I didn't ask my father, and could not ask my grandfather, I have researched four books about the emigration of the Mennonites to Russia, the country where I was born.

The most detailed information I have found was in the book written by Professor Benjamin H. Unruh called, in German, "Die Niederlaendish-Niederdeutschen Hintergruende der Mennonitischen Ostwanderungen in 16, 18 and 19 Jahrhundert". According to this book, and also the book entitled, "150 Years of Mennonites in Russia", our ancestors, the Anabaptists, because of persecution, fled from Switzerland and Westfallen,

Germany in 1530 into what is now Belgium and the Netherlands, where they made their living with cattle breeding (stock farming). Their settlements were given to Prussia when Poland was divided in 1772. So they became citizens of Prussia, but only for a few years.

Here I would like to insert that my wife and I had the privilege in July of 1984 of visiting the Netherlands (Friesland) where the Friesens come from. We crossed the North Sea coast, saw and talked with the farmers and admired their buildings which had not changed in the last 400 - 500 years. The house, barn, machine shed and feed shed are all under one high-pitched straw roof. At the same time we visited the monument to Menno Simons. We even saw the house that he had lived in, as well as the church in which he had preached. For us it was an unforgettable experience. (Thanks to Peter Neufeld who married into the Friesen family, in Neuweid, Germany. Peter took a few days off work to take us to Friesland. "Thanks Peter and Susan!")

The Anabaptist doctrine took roots in the Netherlands and so here too they were persecuted. Menno Simons, a Catholic priest, left the Catholic Church and joined this group of believers. Not long after, he became the leader of this group of Christians, and so they were named after Menno Simons, and were called the "Mennonites". Menno Simons lived and laboured from 1492 until 1559, when he died at Fresenburg on January 13 at the age of 66. I would advise anyone interested in the history of the Mennonites to get the book, "The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia 1789 - 1910" by Peter M. Friesen.

My forefathers came to Russia from East Prussia at the invitation of Catherine the Great. She was a German princess who, after the death of her incompetent husband, had become the Ruler of Russia. The first contingent of Mennonites arrived in 1789 to an area that later came to be called the "Old Colony".

My great, great, grandfather Peter Friesen (all my Friesen grandfathers were called Peter) settled in the Chortitza Colony in the village Neuendorf in 1796. He was 38 years old, and his wife Anna was 28. They arrived with 5 horses, 12 cattle, 4 sheep, 8 pigs, a small plough and a wagon. He was a farmer.

My mother's great, great grandparents, the Heinrich Kroekers came from Krebsfeld place Elbing, West Prussia and arrived in the Molotschna Colony, Ladekopp village on June 20, 1805. They were also farmers. My great, great, grandfather was 68 years at the time. His wife, Helena (nee Entz) was 37. (She was most likely his second wife.) He owned 3 wagons, 1 plough, 2 harrows, 5 horses, 11 sheep and thus they started a new venture in a new country, with the hope and faith that God would bless their efforts, which He did.

I am from the fifth generation and am glad that my father Jakob P. Friesen left a family record behind. It is a booklet with my grandfather Peter Friesen's handwriting in it. The inscription on the inside reads like this, (translated from the German): "This book belongs to Peter Friesen in Ebenfeld, February 8, 1887". Since I have introduced my physical and spiritual background, I will continue from there.

I am sorry to say that I cannot report anything about my grandparents from my father's side. All I know is that my grandfathers name was Peter and his wife was Anna. I can't tell whether they were farmers or to which church they belonged. All I know about them is that they lived in the Krimea in South Russia, in the village Anovka and that they moved to the village Safronovka, where they died. Both died at the age 55. Grandpa was five years older than grandma. They had nine children, two girls and seven boys. My father was the seventh child. He was named Jakob and he married Maria Kroeker. Together they had twelve children. Of these twelve, only six grew up, the others all died at a young age. The children that lived were Sara, Johann, Peter, Abraham, Jakob and Dietrich.

GRANDFATHER JOHANN KROEKER'S YOUTH

Johann Kroeker lost his parents when he was a young boy, so he was adopted (family unknown). He worked at his new home on the farm until he was grown. He had a good nature and a good temperament. He didn't find it hard to smile and was very easy to get along with. He was honest, worked hard and had an

inner desire to do the right thing. When he grew into his teenage years, he found it difficult to find a good friend to visit with. The boys of his age in his village were rough and could be very cruel. They drank whiskey, smoked and used bad language. He tried his best to stay away from them, but on Sunday afternoons or evenings they would come as a group, get a hold of him, and inspite of his struggle and defence, they would drag him along to where they were going and would try to make him do the things they did. This carried on so long that he finally got in with them and also started smoking. As far as I know, he never got into the habit of drinking.

When he was grown up he had the desire to learn a trade and so he chose to become a blacksmith. He learned to make wagons, ploughs, droschkas (spring carriages), harrows, etc. He was a perfectionist in his work and so he pleased his customers. After he had established himself as a blacksmith in a village, he desired to find a good girl whom he could marry. Since he could not find one in his village, he looked around in other villages.

GRANDPA MEANS BUSINESS IN GETTING MARRIED

One day grandpa heard about a girl who was nearly blind and found out that her name was Sara Enns and that she lived in Kleefeld. He thought that she would not refuse him if he proposed to her. Apparently she must have already heard about him. One day he saddled his horse, rode to Kleefeld and proposed to her. She said, "Oh no, that Kroeker's Johann I do not want. He may as well go home and look around for someone else." So, sadhearted, he turned for home. But he could not forget Sara Enns. So he made it a matter of prayer and decided to wait and not look around for anyone else.

After two years of patiently waiting and praying, he received a letter from Sara Enns. In it she said that she was now ready to marry him if he still wanted her. Well, for him it was an answer to prayer and so they got married on June 4th, 1872. Grandfather Kroeker was 26 years old and grandmother was 28.

A NEW HOUSEHOLD WAS ESTABLISHED

Now they started life together. Grandfather was very busy working in his shop and many times he would give grandmother a helping hand where and whenever needed in the house, because of her blindness. He did it gladly because he loved her. The Lord blessed them with five daughters and two sons (who died in infancy).

Our mother, Maria, was the oldest daughter. Then there was Sara, Anna, Tina and Margarethe. Mother's schooling was only 3 or 4 short years. Since she was the oldest she had to help grandmother as much as time permitted in the house, and grandfather in the blacksmith shop when he needed her. This was hard on her. No wonder Maria, our mother, had back problems all her life.

The following is the story my Grandfather Kroeker told me when I was about 18.

GRANDFATHER'S NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

When grandfather was 28 years old there was a revival meeting in his village of Ladekop. Knowing that he needed salvation, he attended these meetings and found peace and forgiveness of sin. As I mentioned earlier, he had the habit of smoking, and this habit was a real problem to him. He knew that as a new-born believer he should break the habit, but his fingers always reached for a cigarette. He said, "I often tried to quit, but could not gain the victory. So one day I decided to try to quit with the help of God. I went to a place all by myself and prayed to God for help and victory. I said, 'God, you have made me. You love me. You gave Christ to die for me that I might have everlasting life, but I have no victory over smoking and I ask you now to take the desire for smoking away from me. I know you can do it and I plead for victory. Please help me. But if you don't help me, I will continue to smoke until the day I die, but please don't hold it against me when I stand before you on that Great Judgement Day!' Then the miracle happened! When I walked down the stairs, I threw the last package of cigarettes away and never again had a desire to smoke. God gave me the

victory!"

He must have been a heavy smoker because all his life he was plagued by a bad cough. He always carried a little metal box filled with red raspberry shaped candies in his pocket, and when his cough would start, he would take a candy. Many times when I was still a small boy, I would stand ready by his knees waiting for him to cough and would beg for a candy.

Grandfather was a very happy Christian, always ready to testify for the Lord. When he was asked to preach, he would do it gladly even though he was not an ordained minister. I remember him as a friendly and loving grandfather who had compassion for people in need. He had much joy when he could lead a person to the Lord.

Grandmother had a different personality. She was not as outgoing and I always felt that I should keep my distance. Maybe it was because of her blindness...she could not see what nice looking boys we were!!!

I am sure she missed a lot of fun in life because of her handicap. I remember being in their little retirement house a number of times. It was in the yard of their daughter Tina and Uncle Franz Vogt. It was sparkling clean and shiny and often I felt I should not touch the china cabinet or other furniture. However, she never told us not to touch them, but I think it was my respect for her that made me feel this way. Grandpa would take us by the arms, would lift us up and whirl us up and around himself until we were dizzy or he was tired. We all loved him for it and felt quite at ease with him.

He had built an addition onto his house where he kept all his blacksmith tools and where he did some work for other people occasionally. We boys, together with our cousins John and Franz Vogt, loved to go in there and take his big hammers and with a good swing, hit the large steel anvil. We also would take the large foreceps which he used when holding iron in the fire, and try to act like a blacksmith. Grandpa would let us do this as long as we placed things back where they belonged.



My grandparents, Johann and Sara Kroeker.

GRANDPARENTS GOLDEN WEDDING
and GRANDMA'S DEATH AND FUNERAL

I recall vividly being at my grandparents golden wedding anniversary on June 4th, 1920. This was the first such celebration in my life.

We had to drive 20 miles by horses and wagon to get to the village. We left early in the morning. The celebration was not in a church, since their village, "Karatal", had no special place for worship gatherings. There were no schools or private homes available, so this celebration took place in a large feed shed, which had been nicely decorated for the occasion. I remember how all the boy cousins went outside to polish our shoes, so that we would appear proper in the congregation. As we sat there looking at our grandparents, admiring them for living together for 50 years, I thought that that was a very long time. They were both dressed in black. Grandmother

had many wrinkles in her face and grandpa had a nice looking beard. Of course the biggest treat for all the boys was the food on such occasions. We would see to it that each of us got our share.

A few weeks later, on June 20, 1920 Grandma died suddenly and we went back to Karatal for the funeral. The news of her death came to us by word of mouth, since there were no telephones in those days.

Grandfather found life very difficult after Grandma had gone. He would come to stay with us for a while, then go to Aunt Tina's or Aunt Margarete's until he died in 1927 at the age of 81. We had already been in Canada for one year by the time he died. (Grandpa, I shall never forget you!)

FATHER JAKOB P. FRIESEN (1873 - 1921)

Our father Jakob Friesen was the fifth son of nine children. His parents were Peter and Anna Friesen.

Our father was born in the village Anovka, Krimea, South Russia on August 12, 1873. His father died at the age of 55 when our father was 14 and his mother also died at the age of 55 when he was 19 years old.

So my father and his sister Maria walked the street of Anovka one day, talking to people they met, and looking for work. My father found employment with a harness maker. He worked in a little shop, making new and fancy harnesses, lines, halters, saddles and upholstered seats for buggies. Although he worked with his hands, he could not resist the deep inner urge to work on the fields. In the spring he would watch the farmers through his little shop window, as they went to their fields to sow the grain. He had a deep desire to be independent some day and to be a farmer.

FATHER FINDS MOTHER

When father had finished learning his trade, he went into his own business.

One Sunday morning he went to the Ruekenau M.B. Church. In the church he sat next to an elderly gentleman, whose friendliness and kindly spirit

intrigued him as they introduced themselves and got acquainted. Then our father noticed four young ladies, wearing nice Sunday dresses with aprons (as was the custom at that time) walk into the church and sit down near the front. One young lady stuck out among the others. So our father asked the gentleman next to him: "Whose daughter is it who is wearing that particular apron?" Then, with a friendly smile, this elderly gentleman said, "That is my oldest daughter, Maria!"

Well, here was the beginning of a new relationship. I don't know about his proposal, but I know that our father, Jakob P. Friesen married Maria Kroeker on December 4th, 1894.

After they were married, he continued his trade for nine more years. Since he could not buy any land in the Krimea, he moved to Siberia, to the Omsk District, Tokushi.

In Tokuschi lived a rich man by the name of Friesen. His estate was called "Friesenow Chutor". He rented small parcels of land to young families who wanted to start farming. He rented the land on a one-third share basis. So father's dream finally came true. He became a farmer!

By this time, our parents had seven children. Of these seven only three were still living. In 1905, the first year on the rented farm, mother gave birth to a son whom they named Peter, after his father's father and his oldest brother Peter. While Peter was still a baby, mother thought that she would loose him too, through an unknown illness. While she was performing her last deeds to his limp body, he started to move as she placed him in a basin of water to bathe him. Mother's heart rejoiced to see that he was still alive. She was also not well at the time, but inspite of her weakened condition she was able to draw enough milk for Peter, since he was too weak to nurse. There were no baby bottles in those days, but through tender loving care, mother managed to raise him.

THE NINTH ARRIVAL IN OUR FAMILY

It was August 31, 1907. Harvest time was in full swing. The weather was great and everyone worked hard to get their share of the crop into the dry

grainery. Our mother felt quite good in the morning and throughout the day, helping where she could in spite of her pregnancy and her family.

When the days work was done and mother and dad could relax, the family was ready for bed, and mother said to dad: "I am sure I feel the birth pains coming". Our father quickly rushed to the village to get a lady to help with the birth of the child. Mother and dad trusted God that everything would work out, because they had dedicated the child to be born to God before it's arrival.

In those days there were no doctors that you could call on at a time like this. There were no hospitals or nursing care. Births happened at home. If the child died, it was sad, but if the child survived, the parents were thankful to God.

To their pleasant surprise, and gratitude to God, mother gave birth to a son. A healthy, strong baby boy. To date, three girls, (two Marias and one Anna), and one son, Jakob, had already died. Now the time had come to find the proper name for this baby boy (this newcomer to the Friesen family). After going through the list of names from my father's side, they decided on the name "Abraham", after dad's younger brother. Sara, my oldest sister was twelve by then, and could be a big help in the household.

They soon found that this little baby boy was going to make it, and it did not take long for him to become the centre of attention in the family. He gained weight, started to smile and say "goo-goo". I am sure that by now the readers of these pages already know who this baby boy was. It was me, Abraham Jakob Friesen, the ninth child in the family, now 78 years young, with many blessed, interesting and exciting experiences behind me. If the reader will just keep on reading, he will agree that the prayers and dedication of my parents have accompanied me throughout my life. This does not mean that I was always in the will of God, (by no means), but I have always felt the hand of God upon me. I was always aware of His presence, and have felt His special protection on numerous occasions, even when I was disobedient to His call and His will, especially in my later teens, when I thought that I did not need the Lord.

Our father desperately wanted to come to America, but mother was not willing to depart from her homeland and her family. Her greatest fear was to cross the wide endless ocean in order to get to America.

Times on the farm were hard for them. Father loved horses and was very proud of the five horses that he owned, and he took good care of them. One morning he went into the barn and found that two of his horses had been stolen. He was heartbroken. It was winter at the time and the horse tracks were still visible in the fresh snow. Together with a neighbour, he followed the tracks left behind by the thieves, directing them to a little village close by. After searching for some time he was unable to locate his horses and returned empty-handed and with a heavy heart. Since horses were a necessity to work the land on a farm, the loss was deeply felt.

While our parents farmed in Tokuschi on the Friesenow Chutor, three sons were born to them. Peter, Abraham and Jakob No. 2. Although our parents were happy to be farming while raising their family, they were not willing to stay in Tokuschi indefinitely. They had heard of a new settlement in West Siberia, called the Barnauler settlement in the Kulunda steppe. This settlement had free land, plus 160 rubel was given by the government to each family that settled there.

BARNAUL, SIBERIA, A HARD BEGINNING

For many people, Siberia is a frightening name. In times past, criminals, murderers, revolutionaries, etc. were exiled to the north. But also many Russian Christian believers were sent here because of their faith. Now this frightful Siberia had changed to be a blessing to many, like the Mennonites, Lutherans, and Catholics. Many Russians found Siberia to be a quiet homeland where they could live in peace. Different settlements had already begun, such as Omsk and Tokuschi where our parents were living.

A group of people settled on the River Irtysch, 20 to 40 miles west of Pavladar. My Uncle Johann moved to this settlement.

The largest Mennonite settlement in Siberia was

Barnaul, Slavgarod. It was founded in 1908 - 1909. For several years scouts had gone out and with a discerning eye had selected this area, because it was most suitable for farming. It offered room for thousands of families and gave them hope for a secure economic future. It was located in the Kulunda steppes in the Province of Tomsk, between the Ob and Irtysch Rivers, 270 miles west of the Trans-Siberian Railroad and 90 miles west of Kamen on the Ob.

Here the Mennonites received 50,000 desjatines of land from the government in the Barnaul District. According to tradition, they divided it into farms of 50 desjatines each. Prior to this they had bought 21,645 desjatines in the same place, so that in 1925 Slavgarod - Barnaul settlement numbered 58 Mennonite villages with a population of 13,173. The city of Slavgarod, which I shall mention more often, developed with amazing rapidity, due to the industry and energy of the Mennonite people.

WE ARE ON THE MOVE

It was in the spring of 1909 when our parents, together with 10 or 12 other families, started the 700 mile journey. They were off to a new homeland, a place they had never seen, but had only heard about. But they also had reserved a place in the village Gnadenheim (in English this means "home of grace"). Most of the settlers had moved there the year before, in 1908, and had already established their homes.

Our journey was to take at least two weeks. Into a covered wagon hitched to three horses my parents packed six children and all their worldly possessions, including some chickens. Brother Jakob was only a baby of about 4 months. Father had made a swinging canvass cradle for him, which was fastened to the ceiling of the wagon. Jakob did not seem to appreciate this because he cried at the top of his lungs for most of the trip. How mother managed to survive, to keep us clean and alive, I will never know!

After the second or third day on the road, while we were travelling through the city Omsk, one of our horses dropped dead on the street. He had a heart attack. He must have known that this could be a long,

hard journey!

Since we couldn't leave a dead horse lying in the middle of the street in the city, father had to find someone who could dispose of its remains. This meant that the rest of the journey had to be made with only two horses to pull our wagon. The cows were tied behind the wagon. Of course I don't recall all of this from experience since I was only two years old, but I lived through it. My older brothers told me about what they remembered about this journey when we lived in Canada.

There were no highways. There were not even any roads outside of the towns. We only had trails to follow. A number of families had made this journey the year before, and it was their trail that we followed.

One of the most exciting experiences during the entire journey that my brothers could recall was when the trail led to a lake without a bridge to cross it. We knew we had to get to the other side. After the men had surveyed the situation and had consoled their wives and children that all would work out, they hitched 10 or 12 horses to one wagon at a time and proceeded through the lake to the other side. Fortunately the lake wasn't very deep, but they used several teams of horses per wagon to safe-guard against getting stuck, and also to prevent the horses from being overworked. Since only one wagon could be pulled at a time, the horses had to be taken back and forth until the last wagon was high and dry on the other side of the lake. I can imagine that it must have been hard on our parents and also on the horses that had to pull the loaded wagons through the water.

They travelled during the daytime. At noon and at night they grazed the horses, cooked their meals outside if weather permitted, and fought off mosquitoes.

Only two families from this caravan settled in Gnadenheim. The Herman Klassens and our family, the Jakob P. Friesens. The others settled in other villages. For the time being the Herman Klassens parked their wagon at Isaak Brauns, (their relatives), and our parents found a parking place at Martin Enns'. Both of these families lived in the centre of the village.

The following day father and Mr. Klassen went to look at their new homesteads. These homesteads were next to each other. The Klassens were to have the first one to the right on the S.W. corner, coming into the village, and ours was to be next to the Klassens on the north side. So the two men went to visit neighbour No.3 and found that his name was also Jakob Friesen, but not related to us. So Mr. Klassen turned to my father and said: "It is not fair that two Jakob Friesens should live next to each other. There should be a Klassen in between them." And so our father traded places with Mr. Klassen, acting like Abraham of old with his nephew Lot.

I must say that we always had a very good relationship with our neighbours, the Klassens. Had we been neighbours to the J. Friesens, I am sure sparks would have been flying at times. Mr. Friesen was a very short tempered man, very quick to get into a rage. Our dad could not have taken this, but Mr. Klassen was always calm and friendly and could settle quarrels without getting upset. He truly was a peacemaker and a good neighbour. In the 17 years that we were neighbours, I never saw him angry.

A NEW START IN LIFE - GNADENHEIM

So after two weary weeks of travelling, we had finally arrived at our destination. We found only virgin prairie land waiting for us. The grass was so tall that mother was afraid that we would get lost, because she could not see us when we would run and play.

There was no house waiting for us to move into, which meant that we would have to stay in our covered wagon for several more days. Arriving with six hungry, dirty children must have been a frustrating time for our mother. Since the Martin Enns' had already been there for a year, they were established. They had their own well and so mother got water and cleaned us up. She was able to get whatever else she needed for the family's needs as well.

Since we didn't have any material to build a house and couldn't live in a covered wagon indefinitely, father started to provide a roof over our heads. If you don't have any bricks or lumber to

build a house, you do the next best thing, and that is dig a hole into the ground. So with a spade in hand, father proceeded to dig. When he was finished, he had a basement home for us, measuring seven feet deep, twelve feet wide and eighteen feet long. The roof was made of grass and sods, supported by chopped tree branches and tree trunks. Dirt roof, walls, and floor. All of the same material and colour. We lived under these conditions throughout the summer while



father built a house around and over this hut. (See Plan No. 1). This dugout later became our basement, which served us well. As mentioned, father built a house with walls that were three feet wide. These walls were made from sods that were ten to fifteen inches wide. We lived in this house until 1926.

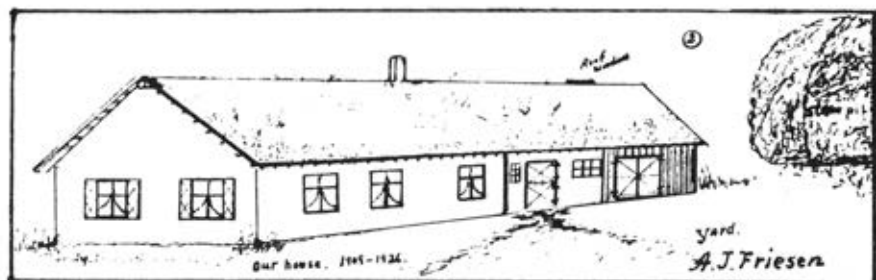
As soon as we were settled in the basement hut, father went 100 miles east to get the needed timber for our new home. This trip took him one week. The lumber was free since the forest belonged to the government. Anyone could get his share for building his home.

We didn't have the poorest or the best house in our village. Most houses were built from sod. Father would plow a sizeable patch of virgin soil with a one shear plow, then cut these sods with a spade into about 15 - 16 inch lengths to build the walls which were about 36 inches wide. Our window sills were so wide that two of us boys could easily play on them with our toys. Instead of mortar, dad used fine dirt to make the walls solid. We smaller boys would run on these walls to pack them down while they were being built.

For the roof, a heavy round beam was placed on the centre of the walls. The rafters were laid along this beam and went down to the sod wall. Shrubs and straw were placed on top of the rafters, and again

sods were used as shingles. Many times we put ashes on the roof also, so that the weeds would not have a good chance to grow. A number of times we had leaks through the roof when we had a heavy downpour.

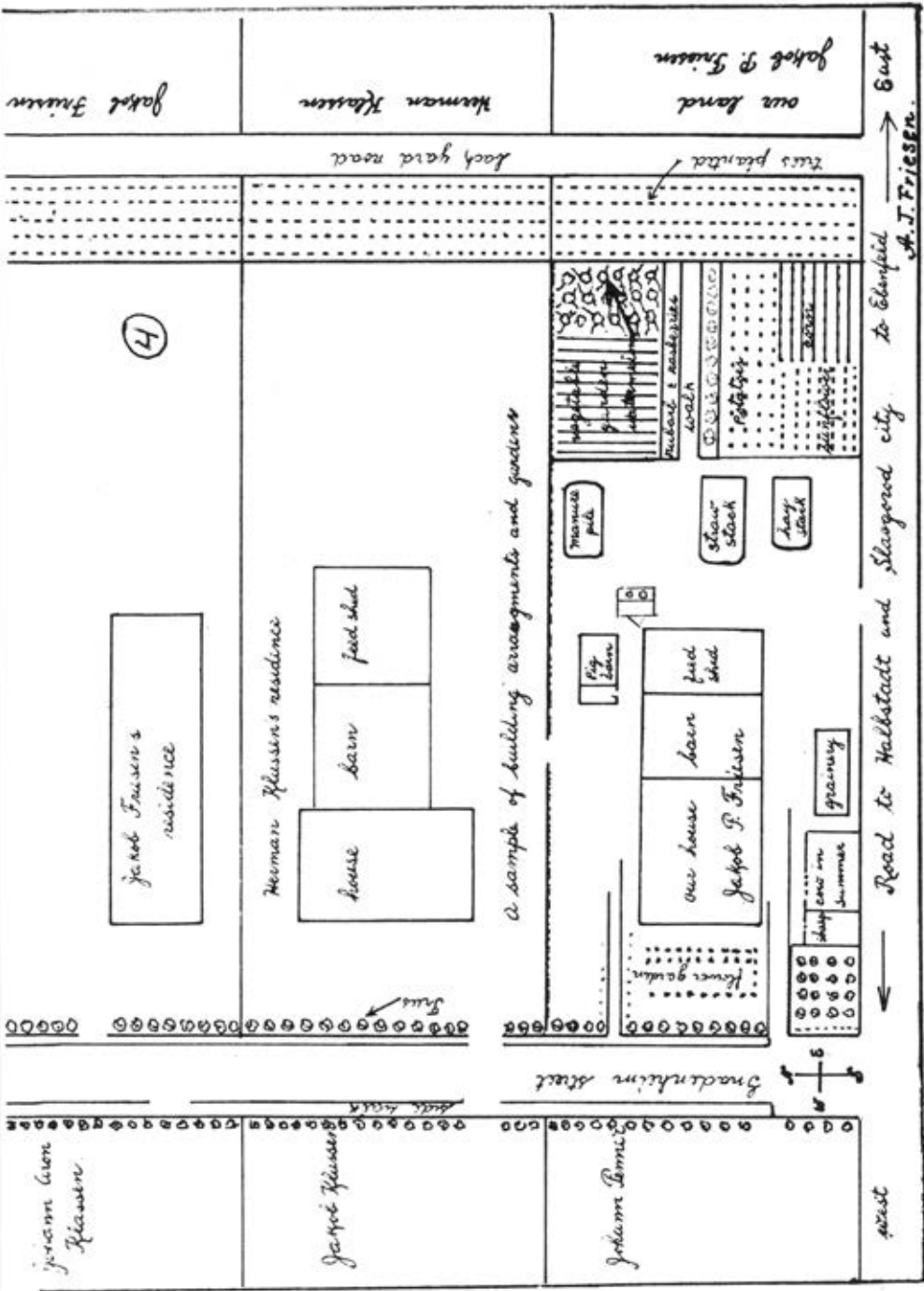
The pioneering days were very difficult. Mother was an outstanding person who was able to cope with difficult situations. Before winter started, father had finished the house, barn and feedshed. This was a tremendous accomplishment for one man, likely with some help from the neighbours. As a rule the neighbours helped each other out, without asking for pay. This helped to build good relationships among the neighbours.

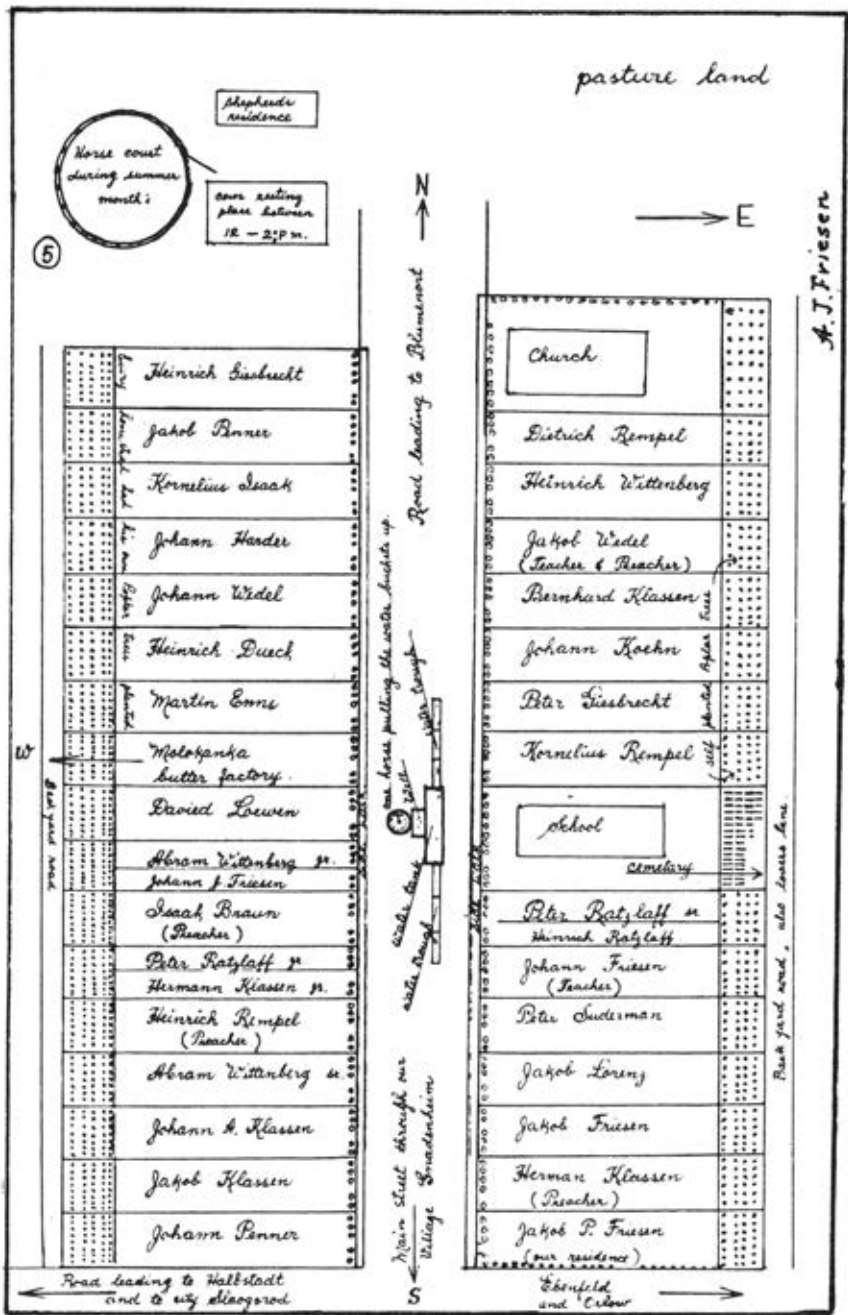


Our house, barn and feed shed were all under one roof (See Plan No. 2). In the winter our house would be drifted over with snow, with only the chimney visible. This made it difficult to get hay for the animals and straw for our large oven in the house.

To solve this problem, dad made a window on the top of the feed shed roof. This gave us light and in the winter we could drive a horse with a load of straw or hay up the roof and push the straw and hay down. We always managed to get through the long winters and were always glad when spring arrived.

When the snow started to melt, we had to shovel a tunnel about 6 feet wide by 100 feet long from our





barn door on the south side, all the way to the street. This was hard work for us. The horses could not walk on the snow anymore. They would sink in up to their belly and could not get up or out.

In Plan No. 3 you see our houseplan, barn and feed shed, the grainery, pigpen, smokehouse and toilet. Plan No. 4 shows you our farmyard, buildings, hay, straw and manure stacks. The flower garden was in front of our house, the garden walk was in the backyard, and on either side gooseberries, raspberries, rhubarb, vegetables, corn, sunflowers, watermelon and potatoes were planted. Behind each of the homesteads several hundred trees were planted so these trees could be cultivated in a criss-cross direction. Behind these trees was a narrow road that the farmers used to move their implements from one place to another. Each farmer had one parcel of land right behind this narrow road that would stretch as far as the border of our neighbouring village. Other parcels would go south of us, and others would go west. It was all measured in equal acerages, so all farmers had to go a certain distance to cultivate and harvest their crops. The north-west portion of land in our village was kept for grazing the cattle, horses and sheep. As you can see on Map 5, our village had 31 homesteads. There was a wide street in the centre and homesteads were on the right and left sides of this street. There was a sidewalk on either side of the street with a little ditch between the sidewalk and the street. The reason for the ditch was that the dirt was used to make the raised sidewalks. Sand and ashes were spread along the walk so that the shoes would not pick up too much dirt. Next to the sidewalk each farmer had his own fence and a gate to drive in. Next to the fences the poplar trees were planted. As a border between each neighbour hedges of willows or acacia shrubs were planted, giving privacy to the individual families.

In the middle of the village was a very large well. The water had to be drawn with horses. While the full bucket came up an empty bucket went down. The water was poured into a large tank which could hold several thousand gallons of water. From this huge tank the water was led to three long water troughs. The trough closest to the tank was high

enough for the horses, the next one was a little lower for the cows, and the third was low enough for the sheep, calves and goats.

Each morning the shepherd would blow his horn, to let the people know that he was ready to take the cattle, horses and sheep to the pasture for grazing. He always started at our end of the village. Therefore we always had to be finished milking the cows by the time he arrived. If we were not ready, he would go on and we would have to chase the cows ourselves along the village all the way to the pasture. Then everyone would see: Aha! Friesen, or Penner, or Klassen was late getting up this morning! That meant, "Shame on you". We would never sleep in in the morning for fear of this publicity.

The shepherd family, Kirgiesen (nomads who were natives of Siberia) lived at the north end of our village. Close to their house was a large coral for horses and colts resting at noon and at night. Next to this coral was the place where the cows and sheep of the village rested in the noon hour between 12 and 2 p.m. Everyday the shepherd would bring all the animals back to the well to drink at noon. Then they rested for two hours and then went back to graze again until supper, when he would bring them back home again. Each horse, cow or sheep knew exactly where and when to turn to get into his yard. The cows were tied to a pole; the sheep were driven into their corral and the door was closed, and then we were ready to milk the cows before having supper.

CHURCH SERVICES

Our M.B. Church was built at the very north end of our village. The reason for this, I think, was so that it would be closer for members from neighbouring villages to come and worship with us. People from three neighbour villages like Ebenfeld, Blumenort, Kleefeld and at times from Schumanovka would attend our church services.

Services were held every Sunday from 9 to 12 a.m. While the people were walking in and getting seated, the choir sang about 4 songs. We had one of the best choirs in the whole settlement. When the service started, the leader made announcements and

would introduce a brother to lead in the invocation. The brother leading in invocation would announce a hymn to be sung by the congregation, would read a portion of Scripture or Psalm, make remarks and then would ask for participation in prayer. After this the choir would sing another song. Then the first preacher announced another hymn and then he would give his message. After this message, the choir sang another song and another preacher would get up, announce another song for the congregation and then deliver his message. These messages were usually from 3/4 to 1 hour long each. For the singing there was no accompaniment by either piano or organ. The choir leader had a tuning fork that he used to get the pitch.

For us boys the services were much too long. We pinched each other at times or just had fun while the service was in progress. We often got so restless that an older man, usually a father of one of the boys, would come and sit between us in order to keep the peace. We waited for the last choir number and the closing prayer, and then we would rush out in the free world, like young calves that were shut in for a long time and finally released.

If there was no special evening service planned, there would be a Bible Study and prayer meeting attended mostly by the elderly people.

SCHOOL

The school was built in the centre of the village. Instead of trees being planted behind the school, the cemetery was there. We never had more than one teacher for all the children in grades one to six.

The first few grades were taught in German. The Russian language was introduced in Grade 3. By the time we were finished Grade 6 we had a fairly good knowledge of the Russian language.

During my public school years I only had two teachers. Mr. Jacob Wedel for four years and Mr. Johann Friesen for two years. Mr. Wedel was a qualified teacher, but Mr. Friesen was self taught. In other words, he had no high school or teachers training. The story is told that when he had gone to

the city to be examined for teaching in a public school, he had been asked, "Why does a dog wag its tail?" His answer was, "Because the tail cannot wag the dog!" With this answer he received his permission to teach.

I must admit that he was a very smart man. His mind was always active. It is said of him that he had always been a studious person. Books were his only entertainment. As a young boy at home and also as he worked in the fields, he would always have books with him. He loved to read in his spare time. He was able to teach us well and he was also a friend of children.

I recall walking past his house one summer evening. He was standing by his fence and looking around. When I approached him, he immediately started talking to me. After asking me a few questions, he picked a leaf from a poplar tree. He took this leaf and talked to me about its colour, shape, and size and about the veins leading from the centre to the edge of the leaf. Then he picked another poplar leaf and compared the two, pointing out the differences. Then he said to me, "God in His Wisdom has made every leaf on a tree a little different." This discussion gave Mr. Friesen a reason to talk to me about the greatness of God in creation. Because of this incident I will never forget him. He also taught us many folk songs and hymns that have made an indelible impression on my life.

Our teachers lived in our village and farmed as well. The school term was seven months long. School started after harvest and lasted until seeding time. Teachers were paid the same salary as the shepherd and were paid by the community. The community also determined the curriculum. Subjects taught in German were Grammar, Literature, Music and Bible (which was very important). Those taught in Russian were Russian History, Geography, Mathematics, Poetry, Reading, Writing and Russian Language.

In our area children started school at the age of seven. The beginners always sat in front, closest to the teacher. Behind them were the Grade 2's, then the 3's, 4's, 5's and 6's, who sat at the back of the room. All the students sat on benches with a table facing the front of the room. The tables were only big enough for an inkwell, a place to put our pens and

pencils onto and enough rooms for a book. Each bench held 6 or 7 students. The student sitting next to the centre aisle was the best student in his grade. Since I was a shy boy I sat right against the wall; the lowest in the class. My friend John Wittenberg sat at the centre aisle, the first in the class. After a few months in school the teacher promoted me to sit between my friend John Wittenberg and the teacher's son, Peter Wedel. That's where I stayed for the rest of my public school years. I could never beat John Wittenberg.

Mr. Wedel was a good teacher. He was very strict and had good discipline. At times I thought he was a bit too hard on his nephews. They found it hard to grasp new ideas, especially in arithmetic. I showed great respect for my teachers, because my father said, "Boys, if you get a strap in school, count on two at home." So I behaved my very best and never had a strap from my teacher.

In the winter, especially on stormy days, father would take us to school in the mornings. On the way home we walked along the fence so that we could find our way.

Christmas was a highlight for us in school. Because the school was too small for a all the parents and the children, our program was held in the church. The tree was lit with candles and it took several men to light these candles. But one year was different. I can remember that this year the tree was nicely decorated, but there was no one there to light the candles. We children wondered what was going on. There was a very smart young man in our village. His motto was, "There is nothing that cannot be done", and so he had planned how to light the candles this time.

This young man's name was Henry Ratzlaff. He was a blacksmith by trade, a good horse rider and hunter. He was good looking and a good talker. He was 10 years my senior, but I always felt good in his presence, because it seemed he could solve every problem. (He lives in Yarrow, B.C. today and is quite elderly). Well, what did he do that Christmas?

Next to the auditorium in the church was the babyroom. He connected all the candles on the tree with a heavy thread. This heavy thread was then strung all the way to the babyroom. So when he lit

the thread in the babyroom, it was like lightening as all the candles were lit at once.

Years later I related this experience to friends in Canada and they found it hard to believe. I met Henry Ratzlaff on one occasion and asked him if he remembered this story. He assured me that it was true.

For the Christmas program, the church was filled with young and old. To our parents, singing, reciting poems or having a part in a Christmas story was always very exciting. At the end of the program, each student was given a bag of goodies. This custom continues today.

Christmas presents were rare in our time. I remember that dad made us a rocking horse one year. Since there were three or four boys, we had to take turns and were not allowed to fight over it. One Christmas dad bought each of the three boys a whitish grey horse. We played with them for about a year, until they fell apart. Then we found out that they were made of refined paper or possibly of china. Most Christmases we were given some candy, cookies and sunflower seeds in the shell. All in all we were happy with these presents.

To close the school year in spring, the teacher asked all the parents to visit the school in the morning to see and hear what their children had learned throughout the year. This was in a sense a time of testing. Each student received his or her marks and they were passed around for everyone to see. The teacher then went through all the subjects, showing what we had learned that year. If the parents were impressed with our progress, the teacher was asked to continue the next year.

MY CHILDHOOD AND FIRST MEMORIES

I had a very happy childhood. My parents were devoted born again Christians and did all they could to raise us in a Christian atmosphere. Our father had morning devotions each day. He would either read from the Bible or would read a devotional book by C.H. Spurgeon and then have prayer. This custom was never changed, regardless of the time of year, springtime or harvest. Even when we were still young, he said to

us, "Boys, I won't always be with you throughout your life. One thing I want you to remember. Never, never start a day without reading the Word of God and prayer. Commit yourself and what you plan to do, to God. Then have a good breakfast. That way you can be assured to have spiritual and physical food for the day." I know that all of us who grew into adulthood have all practiced this to this day.

A similar time of devotion was held every evening. Before bedtime, dad would read from the Bible and he would also often sing with us. Then we all knelt down and everyone prayed. I didn't know any other way, and I still believe this to be correct. There is a saying, "A family that prays together stays together." If this would be practised in all Christian homes today, I believe we wouldn't have as many problems in many homes as we have today.

MY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH FIRE

I recall vividly a day when I was about 2 1/2 or 3 years old. My father was working on the barn and mother was cooking homemade noodles on a low kerosene stove in the summer kitchen. Father had not yet finished the cook stove, which had to be built out of bricks. So the kerosene stove stood in the middle of the room on the dirt floor, and I was watching mother put in the noodles and stir them with a wooden ladel. As I was asking mother all kinds of questions and while looking into the big cooking pot, I got closer to the stove. I still remember the red checkered dress I was wearing at that time. (For some reason mother made the boys wear dresses until we were three years old.) So there I was standing, thinking about how good the noodles would taste, when I noticed that my tummy felt warmer than usual. As I looked, I shouted, "Mama, fire, fire, LOOK!" Immediately she dropped everything and extinguished the fire on my burning dress. That was the end of being a girl. From then on, I wore pants. I am sure that my parents thanked God that my life was spared. Later on in life as I reflected on this incident, I often thought that it is so important to stay away from falling into sin - fire - which not only destroys our body but also our soul.

As a three year old, I remember having a sister named Anna. She was five years older than I. We had only lived in our new house a little over a year, when Anna and my older brother Peter got the small pox. They were both covered with them and there was nothing my parents could do for them. They were very ill and it was Christmas. Mother did her best to care for them, and she tried to feed them, but they could not eat much. Years later my mother told me that during this time I had eaten whatever Peter and Anna left over. Anna died on December 31, 1910. Peter recovered from the smallpox, but had the scars on his face for the rest of his life. I never got smallpox. "Again, God's protection over my life."



Two brothers, Abram and Jakob.

CONSEQUENCE OF SCARING OUR COLT

I was five years old. It was a nice summer day. Father and my brother John had worked in the field all day and before they brought the horses into the barn, John had to take the five horses to the village well to drink. In the spring one of our mares had given birth to a beautiful brown colt. Of course we took all reasonable chances to touch the colt and to play with it. This day mother was frying Rollkuchen in deep fat in the summer kitchen. I asked mother for one of these rollkuchen, took a bite of it and then went into the barn and hid behind the doorpost. There I waited for John to lead the horses into the barn.

As the horses came in one by one, I noticed that the colt was the last to come in, and I had my plan ready. As soon as I would see the colt, I would jump at it with a scary voice. No sooner had I performed

my act, the colt kicked me with his left hind leg, so that his hoof hit right across my nose and above my left eye. Then he ran off. I was knocked down and out. Blood was flowing out of my head.

Father came quickly and picked me up, stuck my head in a barrel of cold water, and wrapped towels around my head. Mother and dad drove the horses as fast as they could run the 20 miles to Orloff, where the nearest doctor and hospital were. Father told me later that the hole had been so big that he could have placed his thumb into it. Mother cried all the way to Orloff for fear that I would bleed to death or that I would loose my eyesight. I remember father carrying me into the hospital. I saw the doctor and nurses all dressed in white and then my memory left me. The doctor cleansed my wound, made a number of stitches and bandaged my head so that I could only see with my right eye. On the way home father stopped at a store in Orloff and bought two different kinds of sweet, coloured cookies. When we got home the whole family could relax again. My father called all the boys together, took the bag of cookies and said: "No one except Abram may eat these cookies (pryanikiss- as they were called in Russian), and then he put them on top of a high shelf.

After about a week we had to go back to the hospital to have the stitches removed. Thank God, only if you look closely can you see the scar. Nothing happened to the eye itself. This could have easily been the end of my life, but God watched over me inspite of my misconduct. Yes, children are a gift from God, but yet they can become a worry, concern and sometimes a burden to parents. I was no exception.

WORK AND PLAY

Our parents had the slogan: "First do your work, and after that you can play!" Since we had the barn full of horses, colts, cows, calves, sheep and sometimes goats, pigs, chickens, ducks, geese, pigeons, cats and dogs, we had to help as soon as we were able to handle a fork or shovel. Even at the age of 7 or 8 we were given certain jobs to do in the barn or outside. In the winter we would feed the animals, clean the barns, sweep the barn floor and of course,

also do our homework. My brother Peter took the most interest in this kind of work. After supper, when we had to study, he was usually so tired that he would fall asleep. He was a dear brother, but found studying hard. However, years later while he was a farmer in Canada, God blessed his efforts, so that when he retired in his sixties, he was financially better off than all the rest of us. That proved to me that education isn't always most important, but it is good to have.

Between February and April the calves were born. They were put into a special place that you can see on Plan No. 3. At first they did not know how to drink milk from a pail, since nature teaches them to suck milk from the mother. To teach them to drink from a pail, we would hold the pail and put their noses into the milk. Then we would stick one of our fingers into their mouth. This would make them suck, and so they learned to drink from a pail.

The greatest fun we had with calves in the village was during the month of May. The weather was warm, the pastures were green and the fields were blooming with flowers of every colour. We took a long rope, tied one end of it around the calf's neck and then took it outside, along the street to the meadows. That is said easier than done. Some calves were bigger and stronger than others. If there were two boys to one calf, they could likely manage. But in most cases one boy could not do it alone. The calf would put the tail up, the head down and with a big noise would go "Ma-a-a-a" and would head off. Many times we could not keep up running as fast as they could, and so we fell down, but managed to hold onto the rope. We were dragged along and finally if no boys came to our rescue, we would have to let go. Now, imagine twenty, thirty or forty boys with their calves, running in circles, uncontrolled. "What a picnic!" It took quite some time until those beasts were tired and would slow down to give us a rest. Eventually we got them trained so they could go along with the rest of the herd.

SPRINGTIME HORSERACING

As teenagers we could hardly wait until the snow

melted. The horses and colts had all been in the barn throughout the winter, except for the horses that we used for travelling. We knew that after a long Siberian winter the animals would like to get out and spread their legs. So we arranged an exercise day when all the boys who were interested in taking their horses out would meet in front of our place, since we lived at the south end of the village. We lined all twenty-five to thirty horses up across the street and then counted, 1,2,3,GO! Whoever reached the other end of the village first (distance of about one mile) was the best rider. The boys repeated this several times and the fathers stood by the gates, watching their boys racing along at full speed.

One spring, my brother Jakob, who was 11 or 12 years old, wanted to race too. We thought that he should not take a fast running horse, so he chose our old Majour. Majour was never in a hurry. He was so tame that we could do anything with him. When we were still too small to climb up from the side, we grabbed his tail, climbed up his hind legs and finally made it to the top.

So here was Jakob, standing in line with the rest of us. When we heard the count "3", we all let go, no one daring to look back since our aim was to reach the one mile limit first. On our way back home, we found Jakob at the village well, all wet, full of mud and crying. When we asked him what had happened, he said, "When old Majour came close to the well and saw a mud puddle, he thought it was time to cool off, so he slowed down, lay down in the water, and by the time I was off his back, he turned around on the other side, and now we are both wet and dirty!" Crying, he said, "I'll never ride him again!"

Yes, being outdoors was nothing new to Majour. He was used for hauling straw and hay and everyday he pulled a sleigh of manure from the barn up a 45 degree hill until he reached the 10 foot high level of snow, and then he pulled it to the manure pile. We had to unhitch the sleigh outside, or else the sleigh would have been in the barn before Majour. All in all he was a very trustworthy and valuable horse.

In the month of May when seeding was finished, we would work on our large manure pile to get it ready for the coming winter. We usually hired extra help

for this work. (Fritz Lautenschaeger from our neighbour village Liebenthal usually helped us). Four or five men, each with a fork, would throw manure into an area of about 60 to 70 feet in circumference until it was about 6 or 7 inches thick. Then it was harrowed flat, rolled with a heavy wooden cylinder and packed. After one week of settling and drying, it was sliced with a spade into rows about 10 inches wide. These rows were further cut into squares of 10 x 12 x 3 inches and set on edge, in zig zag fashion, so the air could get at it. After one or two weeks of drying it was piled up into a criss-cross section like grain stocks to about 4 feet in height. After it was thoroughly dry it was taken into the barn or shed for winter use.

Plan 3 shows the oven in which we used this dried manure. As you can see, each room of our house had a part of this brick oven. This kept the house nice and warm. For baking bread and buns we used straw to heat the oven. It gave a nice even heat.

If calves or lambs were born in February, we took them into the kitchen until they were dry and could move around. Dogs had to stay in the barn, but cats were allowed in our house.

We boys had a big variety of pigeons and were responsible to look after them. We had ordinary blue one, white ones with feathers on their feet, some with a bunch of neat feathers above their head, and one special kind that would fly up high and then come rolling tumbling down. (These were called, in Low German Kulla Doowie). Many times we would kill them and have one pigeon per person for supper.

SUMMERTIME

On Sunday afternoons the 12 - 14 year old boys would go explore our little world. At the end of our village was a birch forest that belonged to the village. It also bordered the Blumenort village. There we spent many happy hours, sitting and talking or telling stories, listening to the sounds of different birds (finches, swallows, larks, nightingales, cuckooes, cranes, hawk, crows and sparrows), or wading through the puddles of water which eventually dried up in the summer. We looked at

the different shapes and sizes of trees or even looked for stoneberries, which are a cluster of small red berries. In the strawberry season we picked the sweetest strawberries you ever tasted.

One summer some of the boys discovered what they called a foxhole. That was something out of the ordinary. So one Sunday afternoon 12 to 15 boys gathered at our place, where we first went into the straw shed for a conference, wondering how we could catch those foxes. We thought that if there really was one, there could also be more than one. We found some thin wire, but not enough, (we thought), so one of the boys suggested that we pull some quackgrass, since it has long roots that could serve the purpose. Quackgrass was plentiful. We marched three or four miles toward Halbstadt toward one of the farms where the fox holes were. We already made plans as to how many we would catch and how much we could sell the fur for. Yes, we built many imaginary castles. We put our slings by the hole, and the following Sunday would walk back to the farm again to see what we had caught, but there was no fox in sight; just another hole. Repeatedly we tried to snare the foxes, but had no luck. We finally gave up fox hunting.

SUMMER GAMES

During the week the only time that we had for playing was after supper before sundown. We often played a game that we called "Ring". We used a flat iron ring that was 7 or 8 inches in diameter, and 1 1/2 inches wide. We divided the boys into two groups. Each boy had a six foot stick in his hand. One group of boys stayed with the ring and the other group went ahead about 100 yards. The boy with the ring would cast the ring forward towards the other boys. If those boys could stop the ring, they would return the throw. If they could not stop the ring, however, they would have to go as far back as the ring stopped and throw from that distance.

I remember one night as we played, a good friend of mine, Peter Braun, tried to stop the ring. He often had his tongue hanging out when he got excited and this time the ring kicked back, landed on his face and split his tongue in half. He had to have it

stitched up, but the scar was always visible.

We also loved to play ball. One game was called "Poluck". Instead of having a ring, we would hit a ball. There was no pitcher in this game. The person hitting the ball would first throw it up into the air and then as it was coming down he would hit the ball with a bat. We also played baseball, similar to the way it is played in Canada.

Another game we enjoyed was called "Puschki". We cut sticks into lengths of about 8 inches and a thickness of about 1 1/2 inches. We would set these sticks up in a square, box-like shape. Then we would back up a certain distance and throw a 4 foot long stick at these short sticks, to see if we could overthrow all the sticks on the pile. This game was similar to bowling.

We had to invent or make our own games. All we could buy for playing with was a black rubber ball. If we couldn't afford to buy a ball, we would make our own from leather or wool or from fine thread rolled up into the size of a ball. As a rule these balls were much harder than a rubber ball. They would also be harder on your hand when you caught it.

CATCHING RABBITS

Since we didn't have ice or skates in the winter, we spent our time sleigh riding or chasing white winter rabbits. We were told that if we could run close enough to a rabbit to spread salt on his tail, you could also catch him. Well, we tried that, but never succeeded. But we found another way to catch them. Since we had no gun or rifle and were too small to use them anyway, we did the next best thing.

As you can see from Plan 4, we all had a few hundred trees planted in our backyards. There we went, either after school or on the weekends, with a spade or shovel in hand, to dig a hole through the snow, between the trees. The snow was about 10 feet high and the hole at the top of the snow was about 4 feet wide. As we dug deeper, we made the hole wider so that at the bottom, it would be 6 feet wide. Then we put a ladder into the hole, carried an armful of straw down and also some matches. We lit the straw, quickly climbed out of the hole, pulled up the ladder

and continued to feed the fire more straw, so that the snow would melt and during the night it would freeze like ice. The next day we put branches over the hole, cover the branches with hay or clover and the trap was finished. We could hardly wait until the next morning to see if we had been successful with the trap. We took along a large sack to catch the rabbit, then we would put him into a bag, take him home, butcher and skin it and bring it cleaned to mother, to cook for supper. That was very exciting for us.

A LITTLE MORE ABOUT FATHER

Our father was a very active man, always engaged in community and church work. Like Grandpa Kroeker, he was a friend of people. It never took long for a stranger to feel at home and comfortable in his presence. The church wanted to ordain him to the preaching ministry, but he felt that he was not good enough for that, even though he did preach at times. I can still see him, walking the living room floor, praying and pondering over his message. To me, his eyes were a sparkle of fire, creating in me a great respect for him. Yet he took time to entertain us boys. He took us on his knees and would rub our cheeks with his beard, would sing with us and he even taught us how to conduct in 2/4, 3/4, 4/4 and 6/8 time before we were school age. He also taught us how to sing in numbers. (Now we sing according to notes; then we sang by numbers).

His greatest weakness in life was for children. He could not pass a child without smiling at it, or talking to it or taking it up onto his arms and kissing it or cuddling it.

The church must have been aware that he was fond of children, because they entrusted all their children to him for Sunday School. This took place in the afternoon, while others had their dinner naps. He had about 40 to 60 students in the school, all in one class. He was a good teacher. He sang with us, and taught us Bible verses (we had to recite a new Bible verse each Sunday). Then he would tell us a Bible story. He was able to keep the attention of everyone from the age of 3 to 14, since he could make the stories come alive. He was the Superintendent of the

Sunday Schools in our district for 20 years. Many times when children would see him walking on the sidewalk, they would run after him, seeking his attention. Yes, they loved him and those that knew him then, and are still alive, speak of him with great respect.

When there was work to be done that affected the whole village, if at all possible, they would ask our father to be the overseer or the foreman. This work was done for no wages. Fathers in the village usually sent their oldest boys to help in this kind of work and my father had a way with young people, especially with young men. He knew that praising them for work well done was better than scolding them for working slowly.

I can remember well when we were between 8 and 10 years old, father would give us something to do within a certain time limit. We thought it was too much. He would say, "Boys, before the tom cat has laid his egg, you've got it all done!" Eventually we caught on that tom cats never lay eggs!

In the summer, when I was about 10 or 11 years old, he would ask me to go along with him before breakfast, to help him turn the sharpening stone by hand, as he would sharpen the knife of our mowing machine. We didn't have a sharpening stone of our own, so we went either to Isaak Brauns or to Martin Enns', since there were only a few such stones in the village. I never looked forward to this job because there were so many knives on a six foot long bar, and each knife had to be sharpened on both sides. At times I acted tired even before I started. Father would usually walk on wooden slippers ("Schloren"), and every time he'd take a step, it would "klopp". Besides that, he was quite heavily built and his stomach would stick out so much that I was really amused at times, just observing him walk. I would say to myself, "That's my Father!"

Our father could also be very strict with us. If we were told to do a certain work and we would play around instead, or fight with one another as boys do, we would get our share of discipline. He would not pray with us, either, before he strapped us. But he always let us know that he loved us. Maybe at times he should have prayed instead.

FATHER AND BROTHER JOHN

One winter evening after supper, there was an evangelistic meeting in our school. Father wanted the whole family to attend, but brother Johann refused to come along. I can still see Johann rebel against father's wishes. Father pleaded with John at first in love, but when that failed, he became loud and strict. John must have been about 14 or 15 then. They both talked back and forth to each other, and it looked like father would have to give John a strap, but John finally gave up and decided to come along. I remember the whole family looking on during this incident and trembling. We were all sure that dad wanted John's best. After we entered the school and sat down, the congregation sang the song: "Wieder fand ein Suender busse". Translated into English it was, "Again a sinner found forgiveness". That song spoke to John and he broke down and gave his heart to God. How different was the homecoming that evening. I will never forget it! There was reconciliation, rejoicing and a calm and peace because John had found forgiveness in the service that evening.

From then on father and John understood each other. They worked together in Sunday School and before father died in 1921, John had full control and responsibility in the Sunday School. John asked for help in teaching and it didn't take long before he had four classes going. He took special interest in us teenage boys. He practised extra songs with us which we sang at the Sunday School picnics.

In his early twenties, he organized a youth choir and became our first youth choir director. Yes, many lives have been touched through brother John because of his decision that winter evening. I noticed in his life that witnessing to others and preaching the Word were his priorities in life. He found joy in serving Jesus.

THE LORD HEALED JOHN FROM T.B. IN 1915

When I was 8 years old, I recall John was very ill. The doctor diagnosed his illness as tuberculosis. This struck him hard since he was only 17 years old. Everyone in the village could see him

losing his health. They would even say, "Nah, that Friesen's Johann will soon be buried." In those days there was no medicine for this illness. So the doctors told my parents and Grandfather Kroeker to pray for him.

One day John had a strong feeling to go to a quiet spot in the backgarden. He knelt behind a gooseberry bush and wrestled with God, like Jacob of old. There he promised God that if He would restore his health, he would serve Him the rest of his life. Then something wonderful happened. He felt a surge of healing power go through his weak body, thanked God for answered prayer, rose up from his knees and came to father and said, "Father, I have a conviction from God that He has healed me". Father said to him, "Johann, if you believe this, then go and hitch four horses to the plow and plow that field." John had not counted on this kind of a response, but he was obedient and did what he was told. Weak as he was, he dragged himself to the barn, harnessed the horses and went plowing all by himself. He had to drive the horses, steer and also hold onto the plow. As he plowed, sweat was dropping from his brow into the furrow, but all the while he was thanking God for healing him. Gradually he gained strength and he knew that he was completely healed. He never had another attack of T.B.

WAR TIME - 1914 TO 1918

As a small boy of seven, I can still remember the news that Russia was at war with Germany. It would take men and horses to fight the war. My mother was afraid that dad might have to go to war.

The government asked for the best horses. The men in our village were directed to bring their best horses to our place and a delegation of men from Slavgarod would come and inspect them. They would take the ones they thought would be best for hauling food and ammunition and for transporting men and wares.

We had six horses at the time and father took good care of them. There was one black one, three brown ones and one white mare. The mare was very alert, and well shaped. This is the one the men took.

As they led her out of our yard with all the rest of the horses they had chosen, our hearts sank within us, to think that we would never see her again. To the government men the horses were free for the taking.



Our family - 1916

At the beginning of the war the younger men were drafted. We all wished that father would be spared. But late in September 1916, when John had regained his health, both father and John were called to serve. They had to leave just before winter. Our house became a house of mourning. Mother was not very well. Sister Sara was 22 years old, Peter was 11, I was 10, Jakob was 8 1/2 and Dietrich was 3 years old.

Father was 43 years old at the time and was sent to Tiflis. There he worked as a harness maker. He had to wear a uniform and a cap with a button in the front. John was sent to Tyumen where he looked after horses in a large barn. Mother had to manage on her own with us boys on the farm. We always rejoiced when we received a letter from dad and John, but when mother read them to us she would cry. That's the way it was in many homes. But we felt safe and secure under mother's management. Whenever she needed advice she went to preacher Isaak Braun or to someone else in our village who was available. She often used her own judgement in decisions. It certainly was not easy for

her since she had always depended on father for everything that pertained to the farm. With God's help she was able to manage.

In April 1917 the government released the oldest men. Our father was among them, but brother John came later. Soon more and more men came home. There was great rejoicing and much new planning.

But not all men returned home. Some had died of typhoid fever and their family's were not notified. Two young men from our village never returned. They were John Penner and Herman Dueck. They had just disappeared. Yes, war is always connected with heartache and tears.

The Czar of Russia was overthrown in March 1917. The Bolcheviks under Lenin had overthrown the Kerensky government in the October Revolution and now the country was convulsed in a bloody civil war. In 1918 there was a combat between the White and Red Army. We in Siberia were spared the perilous times the Mennonite villages in South Russia experienced. However, I do remember rumors that certain men even from our settlement in Siberia were shot and killed. For a while we lived in a scary world. Most of the news came to us by word of mouth, since there were very few newspapers.

BROTHER JOHN GETS MARRIED

John must have already been in love with our preacher's daughter, Helena Braun, while he was still serving in Tyuman, since he exchanged letters with her brother Isaak Braun to find out how Helena was doing. I remember that they invented a special alphabet that no one else could understand, so they could write to each other and not worry about anyone finding out about their secrets. When John came home, he showed us the scripts for his code and we learned it quickly and also exchanged secrets with it.

John got engaged to this beautiful young lady and they were married on February 20, 1919. Father and John built an addition onto the north side of our house and the young couple moved in for a new start in life together.

FATHERS PLANS FOR ME

John was a good student and would have loved to go to a Bible school, but father was not in a position to send him. Besides, he wanted John to become a farmer. My brother Peter was a born farmer and had no interest in anything else except horses and farming. To me father said: "Abram, I want you to study and maybe someday God will call you to serve in a special way."

The men in our village of Gnadenheim got together and decided to organize a high school. They elected several men, including my father, to look for a location and to look for teachers. In the first year, the students were instructed in our church by two teachers. One teacher was Heinrich Willms, and the other was a Russian lady, Miss Olga Pobedimow, from Petersburg (Leningrad). I can still remember the day that my father picked Miss Pobedimow up from Slavgarod (our nearest city) and brought her to our house. I took a great interest in her. I thought she was beautiful. She had a round smiling face, a soft feminine voice and was very attractive. I watched her open her little suitcase which was full of attractive little bottles and boxes. She must have had a headache, because she opened a little box and took out a little pill which she swallowed with some water. That was the first pill I had ever seen in my life. I was twelve years old at the time.

That year I had to finish grade six and the following winter the high school was transferred to our neighbours house, the Herman Kroekers. They had a large home and could spare three rooms to be used for three classes. So now I was ready and eager to go to high school too.

The second year that the high school was operating was my first year to attend. We had three classes and three teachers. Olga's sister, Jewgenija came from Leningrad to teach also. She was very different from Olga. She was taller and not as friendly, and so Olga remained my favourite.

My best subjects were Russian language, Geography and Human Anatomy. Studying the human body was a real eye opener for me. I was fascinated by the many different organs and their functions. We had a

plastic model of a body, the size of a 2 to 3 year old child. The model was all in color and every part could be seen and taken apart. My dream was to grow up and study to become a doctor and go to Africa as a missionary doctor if the Lord would call me. I had heard about so many heathen countries that did not know about the living God and in my heart I felt a love and concern for these poor people in the world. I had a conversion experience at the age of 11 when we had evangelistic meetings in our school. Rev. Jakob Wiens from Omsk and another preacher, whose name I have forgotten, were the speakers. During these meetings they preached "fire and brimstone" and my tender heart was moved to confession. Nearly all school children turned their lives over to the Lord. It was a great awakening and our teacher had good students for at least that school year.

MY SISTER SARA GETS MARRIED

Sister Sara was the oldest in the family and had been a great help to mother in raising the family and also in doing housework, cooking, baking, cleaning and washing. She also helped outside when she was needed in harvest time. She was a very willing worker and she got along fine with mother. To us, she was like a mother, not only loving us but also teaching us manners, and training us in cleanliness, etc. Since we always walked barefoot in the summer, it was her responsibility to make sure that our feet were well washed before bedtime. If she thought we hadn't found all the spots of dirt, she would give us another scrubbing which was never a pleasant experience for us. Sara sang alto in the church choir. She had a beautiful voice. She had also taken dress making lessons one winter and she was good at sewing. However, she had one physical problem and that was that one leg was a little shorter than the other, which caused her to limp. But this never kept her back from doing her work. She was a very capable and happy young lady.

One evening in February 1920, my brother Jakob and I saw a widower coming to see our parents. He had lost his wife and was left alone with seven children. The oldest girl was seventeen and I think the youngest

was two. All evening we wondered what was going on in the living room. We had been told to stay in the summer kitchen that evening. So we stayed there, firing up the stove to keep ourselves warm. Finally this gentleman, Martin Enns, came out of the living room. He had to pass through our kitchen and we saw that Sara accompanied him to the outside barn door. When she got back in we asked her, "Did Mr. Enns come to propose to you?" "Yes", she replied, "I will be getting married to him in about four weeks". This news made us furious. We said, "You are 23 years old and you are going to marry a 38 year old man. How ridiculous!" But there was no use in trying to talk her out of it. She felt that those children needed a mother.

I could easily see what changes would take place in our home after Sara would be gone. I would have to take her place in the house work, in helping mother, and also in milking the cows. I was only 11 years old at the time.

Well, this is exactly what happened. Sara married Martin Enns and from then on I was mother's helper. It actually worked out better than I had expected. Mother knew how to handle me so that I wasn't resentful. As a matter of fact, I learned to know, love and appreciate my mother more. She taught me many things which were useful to me in later years.

Each day when I got home from school I had to help set the table, help cook the supper, wash the dishes, milk the cows, separate the milk and do the things that Sara used to do. Sometimes, before bedtime, mother would say to me, "Abram, would you please massage my neck and shoulders" which I always did with great delight.

Well, Sara was happily married. The Enns' had boys and girls our own ages, but we told them that now we were their uncles. We always loved to go there. But this happy marriage was not to last long. Sara caught T.B. (in those days there was no help for people who got T.B.), became bedridden and died. Her illness only lasted eight weeks and she died on February 4, 1921. She had only been married for eleven months and 14 days. She was pregnant when she died.

FATHERS ILLNESS AND DEATH

In the spring of 1920 father was struck with typhoid fever but after about 3 weeks he recovered. Six months later he was sick again with typhoid, but with the help of Dr. Vollrat (who was originally from Germany, but had been captured by the Russians during the First World War and was sent to Siberia) and supported by many prayers, father was spared once more.

However, in November 1921, like many of the strongest men in our village, he was struck with abdominal typhoid fever.

During the time that father was very ill with a fever and he had to rest in bed, we arranged to slaughter four pigs for the winter. Four or five neighbouring couples came for breakfast early in the morning and then stayed to help us. That was the custom in those years, to help each other. When everything was over, we all had a big supper together. It was like a celebration. The women would "dish up and clean up" and the men would sit and visit. Many times the children of the helping couples would also come over after school and would stay for supper. We ate fresh meat, like liver and cooked spareribs, Plumi moos, potatoes and headcheese. Oh, was it ever good! (What a happy childhood!)

Our father had given all the boys instructions so that we would know what to do on this day. He assigned special jobs to each of us. My job was to fire the boiler with dry branches so that there would be enough boiling water to scald the pigs. After the pigs were killed, their bristles were sheared off and then they were taken through the barn and into the straw shed. There they were hung from their hind feet, with their heads down so the insides could be cleaned out. This was so fascinating to me that I decided to watch. So I filled the burner under the boiler with firewood and branches that stuck out about 18 to 20 inches and headed for the straw shed. There I stood with an open mouth, watching everything and enjoying every bit of it. Actually, I would have loved to help or even to do it myself.

Suddenly, I heard my name being called. "Abram!" Well, I knew all too well that that was my

father's voice. He had been told that I had left my place of duty and that I was in the straw shed. Now the fire was burning outside the boiler. He was annoyed and alarmed, and of course, I was trembling in my boots. When I got close to him, he grabbed me by the arm and said: "Did I not tell you to watch the fire?" He took a harness belt from behind the door and gave me a few straps and then walked back into the house and went to bed. I wished that he would have rather talked to me and drawn my attention to the danger of fire in the barn, but he had done it the fast way. I learned my lesson but was also deeply ashamed that others had seen what had happened. I shall never forget this incident. I was 14 year old at the time. I have never held it against my father, because I knew I had it coming. However, after my father's death, I became the butcher in our family and became an expert at it because of the half hour of watching in the straw shed! I didn't only butcher pigs, but also cows, calves or sheep. I also became an expert in castrating bulls, bucks and boars.

Now back to my father. A day after this incident he became very ill. He was delirious and very restless for about two weeks. In his mind he seemed to be working with immigration papers to go to Canada. Many times he called his son Peter in to give him orders to hitch the horses to the sleigh so that he could go to the city to make arrangements for the immigration to Canada. If Peter would say, "Papa, you are too sick. You cannot go out," father would get nervous and excited. But if Peter would say, "Yes father, I'll go", father would be satisfied and would forget about it. Rumors of going to America were going around before father got sick and he wanted to go to Canada badly. That was why this was uppermost in his mind.

After father had been sick for about two weeks, I also got typhoid fever. I also had a high fever and was also delirious for two weeks. I remember one occasion when it seemed that father would recover, he came to visit me in my bedroom to talk to me about my spiritual welfare. I was not interested. I was too sick and had no concern. So father sent for my Christian Russian high school teacher, Olga, to come and speak with me. She came, sat down beside my bed

and expressed her concern for me. This did not touch me either. I was too weak. I have often wondered since then where I would have gone had I died then? Heaven or Hell?

Father's problem was that he had abdominal typhoid and he had an infection in his digestive tract, in the intestines and in the colon. He had not eaten for a long time. Suddenly, he was very hungry and so he went to the pantry and helped himself to some food. (I think it was pork, which is actually not what he should have eaten since it irritated his stomach and intestines.) Eating this gave him a severe setback and from that time on his health became worse. A few days later he told the family that he would die at 4 p.m. that day. This gave us all a great shock. Mother could not let him go and went around the house weeping. During my illness the family had moved me into my parents bedroom and had moved father's bed into the living room. From my parents bedroom I could see everything that was going on. When 4 o'clock came, father could not die. I guess he didn't realize that mother could not let go of him. So he searched his heart in the presence of eternity and found that he had something on his heart that he needed to confess. Our oldest brother John was called in and the two of them talked things over. After that father was ready to go. When mother saw that father was longing to die, she released him in her heart and once more father announced the time of his passing. It would be at 6 p.m. I watched the clock on the wall in my room. He asked for each member of the family to come to his bedside and he asked that they sing, "Es geht nach Haus, zum Vater haus, wer weis, vielleicht schon morgant". ("I am going home to my Father's house, and that might be tomorrow".) Mother was crying and wiping the tears with her apron. I witnessed all this from the bedroom. Then father wanted to say something to each member of the family. When they had all passed by his bedside, my brothers came to help me dress so that dad could have a word with me too. While my brothers were getting me ready, I heard father say, "This is not dying, to go to my God!" By the time I got to his bedside with the help of Peter and Jakob, his eyes were already broken and he could not see me nor speak

to me. Those had been his last words. He was in a coma and shortly after he took his last breath and was gone.

We had all loved our father dearly, but now his end had come. Mother stood beside his bed, weeping with the rest of the family, wondering what the future would hold for us all without a father and husband (and with our country in a political mess). Father's body was prepared for the burial and placed into our neighbour, Herman Klassen's garage until the day of burial. That took place on January 1, 1922 in the Gnadenheim M.B. Church. The body was left outside of the church because of the contagious typhoid fever from which he died.

After a few days I too felt a little better and was hungry for food. My mother was very careful about what she gave me to eat. I remember that our minister's wife, Mrs. Isaak Braun, sent her daughter Susie to bring me a pot of buttermilk moos (part buttermilk and part sweet cow milk, cooked up with very fine crumbs made of eggs and flour). Mother strained this moos through a sieve, and seperated the crumbs from the milk and gave me only the liquid to drink. It tasted wonderful and was easily digested. In a few more days I could dress and be around the house again, but I was not strong enough to attend my fathers funeral. So my friend John Wittenberg (who sat next to me for 6 years on the school bench) came over to be with me for the afternoon. I appreciated that very much. "Thank you, John!"

FATHER HAS GONE, AT 48

Father has gone to be with Jesus
In the land of fadeless day,
Where the flow'rs are ever blooming
And all tears are wiped away.
 He has gone and we will miss him,
 But some day beyond the sky
 We will meet him in the glory
 We will see him by and by.
He has gone to that fair city
Where the living waters flow,
Where the shadows never lengthen
And they know no grief, nor woe.

He has gone where sin and sorrow,
Pain and sickness never come;
He has made the journey safely
And at last arrived at home.
Long on earth he served his Saviour,
Trusting only in the Word;
Now he's absent from the body,
But he's present with the Lord.
 Friends will greet him over yonder,
 He will be no stranger there;
 For he lived among God's children
 And their glories he will share.
He has left us, sons and daughters,
Mother of his children dear,
She with whom he toiled and suffered,
He has left us, left us here.
 We will not forget the husband,
 Nor the Father, kind and true;
 For we all expect to meet him
 And to see our Saviour too.
He will welcome us in heaven,
We will meet him face to face,
And together tell the story
Of the Saviour's matchless grace.

Author Anonymous

Now life went on without father. Brother John was married and on his own. Peter and mother together took up the responsibilities of the family and the farm. Since I already had missed school for half the winter, and since father was gone, I didn't get back to high school but tried to be of help to mother at home.

MOTHER STRUGGLES THROUGH THE DEPRESSION YEARS

Having given birth to twelve children and being fairly weak physically, mother was always occupied with feeding, clothing, cleaning and looking after the welfare of the family. Father had always been the boss, the person in charge. This relationship he had established on the first morning of their marriage. Upon getting up that first morning, he had asked mother, "Who shall wear the pants from now on?" Mother replied, "You, of course!" From then on, father took the rein in his hands and mother was happy

that she had someone with her whom she could fully trust, love and depend on. But this all changed with father's death.

Three months after father's funeral, Dietrich, the youngest child who was only seven years old, got very sick with smallpox. He was covered with them. I can still see them on his face and body. We all felt very sorry for him, but we could not get any professional help. The smallpox just had to run its course. Mother prayed and wept and looked after him. At one time it seemed that he would die. Dietrich was listless and motionless and expressed his desire to die, but then the turning point came and improvement was noticeable. As the spring sun was rising and the winter snow was melting on the Siberian steppe, our dear brother Dietrich began to walk around again and enjoyed the warm sunshine outside occasionally. One Sunday afternoon, instead of going to visit my regular friends, I took Dietrich by the hand and went out into the field and played ball with him. I was so thankful that God had spared his life so he could be with us. Mother was so lonesome for dad, many mornings she would say, "I wish I could have dreamed last night, seeing dad!" She felt the loss even more than we did, because we still had mother.

DEPRESSION AND FAMINE - 1922

I remember the fall of 1922. I had just turned 15. We had just harvested our crops when a summons was sent by the government to all villages that each village was to send so many 1000 pud (40 pounds in a pud) of grain (wheat) to the city of Slavgorod for taxes. Our village was to deliver 8000 pud. Like any other year, we had taken 32 pud of wheat to the mill in Halbstadt (our neighbouring village). We usually waited for a few hours and then brought our flour home. At the same time as it was being milled, it was also separated into pure white flour, darker flour and bran.

With this summons, a meeting was called for all farmers to attend. Since father could no longer represent our family, Peter was sent to this meeting. At this meeting the farmers calculated how much grain each farmer had to ship. Our share took more than we

had actually harvested.

Each village had to ship their grain on a certain day so that not all villages would deliver at the same time. The grain was sacked (4 pud per sack), loaded onto the wagon and a caravan of wagons went to Slavgarod. Peter and I each had a load. When we got to Slavgarod we saw that all graineries were already filled up. The trains were not able to take the grain away to the needy cities fast enough, and so they did the next best thing. We were sent somewhere else to unload our grain. Upon arrival we found that we were to unload our grain next to a large scale. Here we watched.

Walls in the shape of a square city block were made of grain filled sacks. These walls were filled with grain several storeys high. Men were hired to take one sack at a time on the shoulder, climb the ladder, open the sack and pour out the grain. Even if we had already unloaded our sacks from the wagon, we were told to reload them again, since the scale needed to be moved to another place. So we did as we were told. Wrestling with these heavy sacks of wheat was very hard work for us teenage boys. When we were finally finished we went to our uncle and aunt, the D. Penners in Slavgarod, who had a large house and barn, where we could stay for the night to rest and feed our horses. Next morning we left for home which was a four hours drive.

Whoever could not deliver his quota in grain had to slaughter cows, pigs or sheep to make up for the amount due. We had to slaughter one cow that fall. We brought it to the city where it was weighed and unloaded in an open space. Already there was a great heap of carcasses. Nearby was an empty building. There were also large buildings that were all filled to the brim. You can imagine what happened in the spring when the warm weather arrived. The carcasses all thawed, creating a terrible stench. Dogs came from all over and celebrated day and night on these carcasses. Much of the grain was also spoiled, as it rotted and turned sour since the transportation systems was hopelessly inadequate to carry out the task. This caused a dreadful disease in the city. A pestilence as this place had never before witnessed. Young and old alike, died by the hundreds. They were

taken out of the city and buried in mass graves.

INFLATION IN 1922

The following is a quote from an older man who lived through this time of inflation. "It was the time where even a poor man became a millionaire. Yet, if he had nothing but printed paper money he would starve to death, because he could not eat the money. I wanted to travel from Slavgorod to Meletopal, Molotschna, and this trip cost me 40,000,000 rubles. That seems very expensive, but if you compare it with the price of produce and other wares, then it was not so much. For instance, one arschien (measurement 28 inches long) flannel cost 7 million rubles; one pound sugar - 2 million, one pound coffee - 2 million; one arschien cotton - 2 million. This was in September of 1922. In November 1922, one pound of nails cost 2 million rubels; one arschien oil lampwick - 4 million; one pound raisins - 3.5 million; one pound of candies - 10 million. In January 1923, a Christmas tree cost 4 million; a registered letter - 2 million; a regular letter - 1 million, one postmark - 1/2 million. If you found a 10 rubel paper bill on the ground at the market, no one would even bother to pick it up. It was worthless.

One year later the standard of currency came back. The Tscherwonez (like the 10 Rubel) was calculated after the gold rubel and the prices became more normal. For instance, one ball cost 90 kopeken (like cents); one pound of sugar - 56 kopeken, stamps for letters - 20 kopeken. One rubel was worth a half dollar. In comparison with prices before the war, prices were up about 100%." Yes, inflation. What a terrible word! God forbid that this should ever happen to this our dear country of Canada.

LEARNING THE SHOE MAKING TRADE

In the winter of 1922, after paying our taxes with grain and meat, there was not much of a future for anyone. People had hardly any money and could not buy the wares they needed. Many things were not available on the market.

The year before this, my brother John had bought

half a homestead in the middle of our village. He was now living on his own. He started his own business in the living room of his house. He collected old spades, shovels, steel saws and if at all possible, a 4 to 6 foot pulling hand saw. These he would cut up into 3/4 inch strips and shape into table cutlery like knives and forks. I was his helper. I had to turn the grindstone by hand. That was a very tedious job, but it gave me something to do. When the product was finished, he sold them. If the people didn't have money to pay him, he would take a few pounds of wheat, barley or oats in trade. Since his wife Helena was a good seamstress, she sewed for other people. When people recognized what John could do, they even asked him to fix their shoes or to make new ones. So he did, and I again was his helper. We had many discussions as to how to go about making shoes, but we always found a way. We even tore old shoes apart and used these parts as patterns.

But I always thought there must be an easier, more practical and accurate way of making shoes. After the harvest of 1922, a friend came to see me. His name was Abram Remple. We were school pals. He told me that he had just returned from the city Slavgorod, and had heard of a very fine qualified shoemaker who needed a helper. So John and I went to see him to try to make arrangements. We found out that he was a First World War prisoner who had been sent to Siberia. Here he had fallen in love with a Christian Baptist girl, had married her and now had two little boys. When I looked at the new shoes he had made, I was astonished at the excellent shoes humans hands could make! Of course I compared his workmanship to ours. After he looked me over, he asked me a few questions like, would I be willing to milk his two cows, clean the barn, look after the pigs and whenever he and his wife wanted to go out, would I do the babysitting. His final question was, would I mind sleeping on a strawsack on the kitchen floor? I answered that I would be willing to do all these things. I only wished that I would be able to produce fine work like his, and that I would become a number one shoe maker, the only one in our colony of 58 villages.

My imagination ran away with me. I thought about

how after three more years I would be a full fledged businessman, and possibly even employ some men that would help me. I imagined that as I grew older I would be independent, be my own boss, that I would meet a lot of people, and would serve mankind with a very important product, "shoes", that I had made with my own hands! WOW!

My brother John could speak more intelligently to this man, John Reuter, than I could. John Reuter was originally from Austria, but could speak German and Russian. He also asked that I would contribute to my room and board. So John and I decided to go home and next week John would bring me back to him. We would bring a smoked ham, a sack of white flour and some potatoes along to help with the board. I was very excited. We got home and told our family about our findings. They all agreed that this was the best thing for me to do. The only one opposed to this decision was my brother Jakob, since he would have to take my place in the housework and in milking the cows.

The next week I left for a new adventure of living in a city. How different from village life. No friends. No immediate family, although I had an aunt and uncle living in Slavgarod. Since this was the second marriage for both of them, they had a large family. They had boys and girls that were my age. On my day off, Sunday, I went to their church, spent the day with them and made sure I was home again in good time for the night. Since I slept in the kitchen I had to get up before the rest of the family so Mrs. Reuter could make breakfast. I dressed quickly, cleaned up my straw mattress and went to the barn (which was an addition to the house) to do chores. After breakfast, work began.

At first Mr. Reuter showed me how to fix old shoes by putting on patches, half soles and heels. Sometimes I made mistakes and he would get angry with me. But I sometimes watched him as he sewed new shoe uppers. It didn't always turn out the way he liked it either. Occasionally the sewing machine would give him trouble and then he would use some expressions which were strange to me. They must have been in his mother tongue. To me they sounded funny.

When he noticed that I was learning the trade,

he would let me do work on new shoes, like nailing the soles with wooden pegs. He made the wooden pegs himself from birchwood. He also made his own glue out of white flour and water. He first made a dough. Then he washed the dough in cold water until a certain amount of the flour was washed out and until the water stayed clear. He then put this dough into a container, covered it with a damp cloth and let it stand and cure for a few days. We had the very best glue! We used it for stiffening the back of the heels and the toes of the shoes. When I realized that I had found favor in my masters' eyes, I really enjoyed my work. Some evenings he would allow me to go for a sauna and then I would come home refreshed.

It happened on occasion that the new shoes that we had made did not fit properly. Then he would send me to the open market with about 5 or 6 pairs of shoes to be sold. Through this experience I learned how to bargain. It was a nice change.

One day when I was at the open market in the city, I noticed a great crowd of people gathered. When I approached the crowd, I saw Lenin standing on an elevated platform, preaching to the city people. At least I saw and heard Lenin once in my life!

Another time when I was at the market, I noticed two men sitting on a truck without a cab, driving towards us. Since they didn't want to drive into the crowd, they made a sharp turn with full speed. You can imagine what happened. The whole truck went over onto its side, and these men were hurt, wondering how it had happened. That was the first truck I had seen in my life. I think that those men also had no experience in handling it. I took the news of this incident home to my master. He had a good laugh.

Since we had so much work to do, the winter months passed quickly. I soon found myself quite confident in my work and comfortable in my new environment. Mrs. Reuter was a good cook and baker. I really had no needs, except that I was far away from my family. The only communication I had with them was by letter, and they came very seldom.

When spring arrived I got my first holiday. My friends, John and Henry Suderman, from our village, came to pick me up. When I arrived home, I heard bad news. Our oldest horse Major, that Jakob had used for

racing had thrown Jakob and himself into the puddle of water, had an incurable disease. Peter had to dispose of him. There was no gun in the village to shoot him. So Peter took a big butcher knife in his hand, and led old Major to a spot about half a mile north of our village. He led him off the road. Peter took the knife and while Major was standing, Peter cut his throat. He had to watch him bleed until he dropped dead. It was a shaking, unpleasant experience for Peter, but it had to be done. This happened in the winter. By spring the wolves had eaten him up.

The other horses had also come in contact with a disease that winter and all five had died. Peter told me that when we had taken our wheat to Slavgarod in late 1922, our horses must have come into contact with other Russian horses that had the same skin disease. Apparently there was no cure for this disease. All we had left were two cows, a few sheep, a 250 pound boar and some chickens. So mother and Peter had decided they would trade one cow for a horse. Peter already had a horse in mind, and so he made the deal. He brought this fox colored horse home, but it was in very poor shape. Peter cleaned it well and gave it something to eat. The next morning when we came into the barn, the horse was lying down. We tried to arouse him, to get him to stand up and eat, but he would not. Peter began to wonder whether he had been too hasty in making the deal to get this horse. But, seeding time was just around the corner and we needed a horse. So Peter, Jakob and I tried to help this poor beast stand on its legs. We grabbed him by his tail, legs and neck and finally we got him up. While we had our breakfast, we had a conference to decide what to do to give this "fox" some pep. Since we needed the remaining grain for seeding, we decided to share the last sack of ground flour with the horse. This we did. Peter took special care and interest in looking after it. Although we had to help him get up a few more times, he soon gained strength and was on his way to recovery. Never in our farming life had our family been so low in "horse" power. However, we were not the only ones. Others also had to hitch a horse and cow together to work the land.

One day before we had finished seeding, a Russian peasant drove into our yard and asked whether

we would like to buy some flour. In a way we felt it was an answer to prayer, since we had just shared our last flour with the horse and we could not expect any flour until harvesttime. Since mother had no money to pay for the flour, she offered the peasant some cooking utensils that she could spare. She made the deal and we took two sacks of flour. As soon as he left the yard, mother started baking bread. We were all so happy, thinking that if we used this flour sparingly, it might last until harvest. But when the time came for the dough to rise, it stayed flat in the pan. Time didn't make it rise, and so we suggested to mother to put it into the oven. After an hour we looked into the oven and it was still flat. It should have been baked by that time. So I took a breadknife and cut off some slices, let it cool and then took a bite. But lo, what did we find? The man had mixed sand into the flour, and if we wanted to eat this bread, we didn't dare bite our teeth together since that gave a funny feeling in our mouths. I think the horse got the better deal! The family had soup three times a day for two months. Soup too numerous to mention. For two months we had no bread, buns or cookies.

Spring seeding seemed to go so slowly that mother went to see whether she could get help from some neighbours. With their help we finally got our seeding done. After seeding and planting potatoe peelings, (hoping that God would perform a miracle - and He did!) I went back to the city to continue my apprenticeship.

Just before I returned to the city, one day while we were eating our lunch, we discussed the big boar, the only pig left. Since boar meat is tough, we decided to do something to change the quality of the meat. Mother suggested to call some neighbours who had experience in castrating boars, but I refused to let her. I said, "Mother, we three boys can do this ourselves. We'll throw him down, tie his legs and I will perform the operation". Mother said, "No Abram, you have no experience in this work". I said, "Mother, everyone who does this work had to do it for the first time too and I am confident that we can do it". The boys trusted me and off we went.

I sharpened the knife. Peter cleaned his barn

and put a lot of straw in it. I had taken a box of salt with me and we were ready to start. At first the boar wondered what these boys wanted, chasing him around with a rope in the hand. But finally we got him to lie down. We tied his hind and front legs together and the boys sat on him. I was excited and made the first incision, but wow, what a big testicle. The boar was squealing and tried to loosen himself, but there was no chance. We had him in our control. When I finally finished, I took a hand full of salt and rubbed his wounds with it. This I should not have done, but I didn't know any better. His moving and squealing increased and so we loosened the rope and let him go. He was so mad he could have eaten us alive. We quickly jumped out of his stall and watched him as he grunted away and shed tears. Well, the worst was yet to come!

At the evening feeding he would not come to eat. First thing in the morning I went to see him, wondering whether he would still be alive. Thank God he was. Again he would not come to eat, so I got in to see what his wound looked like and that was a frightening scene. It was all swollen. So I told mother what it looked like, and she quickly got some whey, warmed it up and I went back to wash his wounds with it. He was lying still now and couldn't care less. I thought to myself, "If he pulls through this, we are lucky." Sure enough, after repeated washings, he got up, came to eat and late in fall we had a 400 pound hog ready to be butchered. I made sure I was home for that celebration because I wanted to be the butcher. Through this experience I learned never to use salt, but rather kerosene which blocks the flow of the blood.

When I got back to my apprenticeship, I told my master that I could fix both of his little boars. So one day we both went to work. Again, I was the one to do the cutting, but this time it went smoothly and all turned out well. In the fall we butchered them both.

MY FIRST SHOT AT AGE 16

1923 was a very busy summer making shoes, boots, sandals and all kinds of footwear for young and old alike. One afternoon my master said, "Abram, let's go

outside and have some fun." He picked up his two barrel gun, took a hand full of cartridges, put up his target, went back a good distance, aimed at the centre of the target, and "Bang", hit the centre of the target. After a few successful shots he handed the gun to me, and gave orders on how to load and shoot the gun. When I pulled the trigger, "Bang! I tipped backwards - head down and feet in the air, with the gun lying beside me. I wondered what I had done wrong. The same gun, the same target, but no experience. My dear master John Reuter laughed hilariously. I asked him what I had done wrong. Laughing, he said: "You didn't hold the shaft close to your shoulder and the backfire caused your fall." My shoulder hurt me so much that day that I didn't want to shoot anymore. Later on when I had the opportunity to shoot again, this experience was not repeated. I had learned my lesson.

I really liked my new trade, making shoes. My master observed my work closely, and when he thought I had advanced far enough in the work I was doing, he taught me new "tricks of the trade". One of these was in taking the measurement of a foot and in shaping the last accordingly. If a person had a bunion, we had to build up that area on the last, so that the foot would rest comfortably in the shoe. After that he taught me how and where to take measurements to make a pattern for a pair of shoes, boots, oxfords or sandals. For taking measurements and making patterns he used gadgets which were new to me, but which were essential for making a correctly fitting shoe. It was a great education for me and I was very proud that I was able to learn the basics of shoemaking.

Whenever we had a slow season, and if people had not picked up their shoes (whether old or new), my master would send me to the open market to sell these shoes. It was a nice break for me. It also helped me overcome my shyness and gave me an opportunity to practise the Russian language.

Open markets had always fascinated me. There were so many wares offered for sale. Things from the Russians, Chinese and Kirgisians. Some people had regular booths, others sold from stands or from carts that they pushed. Even livestock such as cows, horses, sheep, pigs and chickens were sold at these

markets.

MY HOLIDAYS IN A BUTTER FACTORY - 1924

The political situation had improved somewhat and the farmers had a few better years. Dairy farming was introduced in all the villages in 1922. The farmers had to bring all their milk to the butter factory, which was located in the center of our village. Here the milk was weighed and tested for cream fat. The cream and milk was then separated by a machine separator and the skim milk was then taken home again.

When I took my two month holiday in the summer of 1924, I got a job in the butter factory, separating milk. Henry Dueck and I took turns churning the the milk. It took about an hour until the butter was ready. Our shift started at three thirty in the morning and we worked until we were finished, which was usually around noon. Another shift looked after the evening milk. The butter master was Kornelius Klassen, son of Herman Klassen our neighbour. All the butter was placed in wooden barrels, taken to Slavgarod and shipped away from there.

VERY LONESOME FOR DAD

One day after working an eight hour shift at the butter factory I arrived home and found mother preparing dinner. Since she would not be ready with dinner until at least 12 o'clock, I told her that I would quickly go to the cemetery to fix up dad's grave. And that's what my intention really was. I picked up a hoe and rake and left, arriving at the cemetery ten minutes later. When I got there I noticed that a new grave had been dug. The men who had dug it must have gone for lunch and had left two spades in the pile of earth. Seeing this gave me an idea. I picked up one of the spades and decided to quickly dig up my dad. I thought there could be no more than three feet of earth over the casket. I also knew that the casket was made of two inch planks that could not be rotten after only three and a half years. So I went to work and in no time at all I hit the top

lid of the casket. All at once I began to shake in my boots! I wondered, "will I be able to take it?...Sure I will!" I cleaned all the dirt off of the top of the lid, and then opened the lid which was the full length of the casket. I stood the casket lid up on end. I looked into the casket and saw nothing but the skeleton. Only bones. All kinds of thoughts went through my mind as I checked the remains. First I looked at the skull which used to carry a nice smile and then at the hollow where his sparkling eyes had been. Then I looked at the arms that had carried me when I was a small boy and at the right hand that had given me my last strap. I saw the legs that had carried his body so upright. All the clothes and the flesh had returned to the earth from which it was taken. As I stood there pondering these things, I suddenly heard a loud voice saying: "ABRAM, what are you doing here? God will punish you for this!" I said, "No, Mrs. Nightingale, He will not punish me. I was lonesome for my dad, but now I am satisfied."

I quickly closed the casket, covered the hole that I had dug and fixed it up nicely with my garden tools that I had brought along and went home for lunch. All this had taken approximately three quarters of an hour. This was Saturday. I had lunch with the family but never mentioned what I had done.

The next day, which was Sunday, Mrs. Nightingale (who had admonished me at the cemetery) told mother on the way home from church, what she had witnessed the day before. Mother was shocked and said, "Abram never said anything." When she got home she said to me, "Why didn't you call me. I would have liked to see him too." I said, "No mother, its better that you didn't see him. Father was not there; only his bones and the skeleton were there." I must honestly say that I have never regretted doing that, but I would not want to do it again. As Christians we can look beyond the grave and visualize our loved ones with the Lord. The Psalmist says: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints", and I am sure that our father is with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and it won't be long and we'll be with Him for ever. Thank God!

MY FIRST LOVE

During my two months of vacation I visited with my school friends. One Sunday evening while it was still daylight, all of the young people decided to visit together in our old school house. Peter Wedel, who was the teacher's son had the key and opened the door for us. We all filed in and sat on the long school benches. Of course the girls sat on one bench and the boys on another. While we were talking and laughing and telling jokes, I looked back to see who was giggling behind me. While turning around I placed my right hand on the girl's desk to support myself. A girl placed her warm and soft hand over mine. I recognized her from school days, but since she was two years younger than I was, I didn't pay much attention. On the way home, Peter came close to me and said, "I think that girl loves you." He knew her better than I did since she was his cousin, and he encouraged me to get to know her. Next Sunday evening we had another opportunity to meet and we found that we had a mutual feeling of affection for each other. We met a few more times as a young people's group during my holidays.

GOING WITH THE CROWD

In recent years I had noticed that I no longer had the joy of the Lord in my heart. I had lost myself in the things of this world and was inclined to go along with the crowd. Father was gone, but mother cared much for me and I knew that she prayed for me daily. But I could not resist the wishes of my friends.

One Saturday night a group of boys got together and planned a prank for Sunday morning. Instead of going to church we planned to go to Liebental, our neighbouring village, and get some homebrew. Since none of us had any money, we decided to steal some chickens to pay for the brew. Jake Dueck and I supplied horses, and Jake Klassen supplied the wagon. We knew we only had a few hours, and so we worked fast. We got our team ready quickly, picked up a few empty bags and caught chickens at about 3 or 4 places until we had two sacks full. Then we drove off to my

friend Fritz Lautenschlaeger in Liebental. During the ride the chickens got restless. The roosters stuck their heads out of the holes in the bags and started crowing as we entered the village. It was a hilarious scene. When we got into my friends yard he came out to see what was going on. I asked, "Fritz, how much homebrew would you give us for these chickens?" He looked them over and said he would give us a quarter of a pail in one large bottle and one regular sized one. We quickly took our bottles and headed for home as fast as the horses could run. By the time we got home the horses were soaking wet and foaming. Two boys had the homebrew, which they hid. We left the wagon at Klassens and Jake Dueck and I took our horses home, tied them up and went to bed as if nothing had happened.

When my brother Peter came home from church that morning he could see that the horse had been used and he asked me what I had done. I refused to tell him. Mother also noticed that there was something wrong with her Abram. My conscience condemned me all day. I felt very unhappy, but I was going with the crowd.

In the evening we planned to celebrate. We met at a certain place in a ditch. The two boys who brought the homebrew were fighting over who would have the first drink. When I saw what was happening, it turned me off, and I got up and went home to sleep, never tasting a drop of that homebrew. "Thank God!" I cried myself to sleep that night. I knew that I had been a bad boy, going with the crowd.

MY LAST SEMESTER IN SLAVGORAD

With good and bad memories I returned to my place of work. My master was always glad to see me come back, and I knew what to do by this time and felt very much at home in the shop. I learned to make shoes to perfection and was proud that I had acquired a trade which could help me throughout my life. I was the only young man in our village who had a trade. All the others were farmers, with the exception of my teacher's son, Jakob. He studied to become a teacher. He was two years older than I and so we didn't have much in common. This last semester of training seemed to go too slowly for me since my thoughts were on the

charming girl Liese Rempel at home in Gnadenheim.

STARTING MY OWN BUSINESS

In September 1925 I completed my training with Johann Reuter and was ready to go on my own. During my training I had acquired various hand tools, and all I needed was a sewing machine and different sizes of lasts. I knew that if I couldn't buy the lasts, I could make them myself.

I arrived home during harvest. All the threshing machines were working hard. My brothers Peter and John had joined together with other neighbours and were threshing at John's place.

One day, late in the afternoon, while I was working on the threshing machine, I saw a wagon drive into the yard. John went to meet the wagon. The man asked him whether Abram Friesen was there. He had been told that he was a shoemaker. I was called and when I greeted the man, I recognized him to be Mr. John Reimer from Blumenort. He told me that his family was leaving for America in a week and that he needed 7 pairs of shoes made for his children. I was shocked! He said that he had a sack full of leather with him. He gave me seven days to make them. I told him to bring his family over immediately so that I could get started. After supper he came to our place with his 7 children and I measured each of their feet.

First I had to make 7 pair of last (14 in all). Then I made the pattern and cut and stitched them on mothers' old Singer sewing machine. I worked nearly day and night and when he came to pick them up on Saturday evening, I had them all ready in my show window. Since he had supplied all the material I only charged him 10 Rubel for the work. All the shoes fitted well and we were all happy.

Mr. Reimer went back to his village and told everyone about the shoes I had made for his family. I no longer had time to go back to threshing. People were soon coming from all directions to either have shoes fixed or shoes made. It was very encouraging.

The Henry Rempels from our village had also sold their place and were preparing to go to America. At their auction I bought a guitar and learned to play it. I paid 10 Rubels for it, which was the money I

had earned making the shoes for the Reimers.

Soon I had so much work that I couldn't handle it alone. My brother Jakob came up with a good idea. He suggested that we hire a colonist girl to help mother with the housework and he would become my helper. Mother agreed to this plan and so I went to Liebental to find a girl between the ages of 18 and 20 who would be willing to work for us. I found a girl named Rosa who had beautiful pink cheeks and was a willing worker, but who also had a hot temper. Jakob was so happy to be relieved from housework and I had no trouble putting him to work in my business. He was smart and learned very quickly. But soon even the two of us could not keep up with the work and so Isaak Klassen from across the street came and helped. Mr. J. Lorenz asked if I would take his son Frank on as an apprentice. It didn't take long and these three boys were fixing shoes and boots. Even felt boots had leather soles put onto them. With their help I could concentrate on making new shoes and boots. I had been able to buy a patching machine that could also be used to sew all the uppers for the shoes. Our workshop was the boy's bedroom which soon became very overcrowded.

In the evenings my friends would come over with their violins and guitars. I would take a break and join them in singing and playing. I felt that I had risen to the height of my career! I finally had my own business.

My girlfriend's mother was also a widow with a large family. (The oldest daughter of the nine children was already married.) Her mother was good friends with my mother and they had much in common. Mrs. Rempel was also a very efficient seamstress. There was nothing that she was afraid to tackle: women's dresses and coats, men's suits and fur coats. She made any kind of clothing, and Liese helped her and loved the work also. So we had something in common.

Some evenings I would go to her house for a visit. I always felt welcome there. On Sunday afternoons we got together with other young people and in the evenings we would take our guitars and sing and play. We both enjoyed this alot. Liese had a soft mellow voice. We both felt that we belonged to each other, but we also knew that we needed Christ as the

centre of our lives. We often talked about committing our lives to God, but never did it. Our courtship was perfectly clean as our consciences directed us.

I often planned that if the political economy would improve, I would like to build a small shoe factory on our front yard. That never happened. In 1925 some of our friends (Peter Suderman's) sold out and moved to Mexico and other neighbours sold everything and moved to Canada. Early in 1926 it seemed that the time had come for Mennonites to move, because even if things had improved somewhat, we had men in our churches who could see the dark clouds coming over us in Russia. Many wanted to leave for Canada.

There were still four boys at home and Peter was of age to be drafted by the government. I would be next and then Jakob would be old enough. Mother made it a matter of prayer as did my brother Johann and his wife Helena.

I recall clearly that early one morning while we were eating breakfast, Johann came to tell mother that he had a clear conviction and promise from the Lord that we were to move. The scripture passage he had received was found in Jeremiah 51:50 and 51. "Ye that have escaped the sword, go away, stand not still: remember the Lord afar off, and let Jerusalem come into your mind." Mother said "Amen" and was in full agreement with the decision to move.

In spring 1926 we sold our farm to David Unruhs, who later moved to California in 1930. We sold the house on the condition that we could continue to use one room for ourselves until we could leave for Canada. I moved my shoe business into the straw shed so that the whole family could sleep in the one room I had been using for my business. All the farm equipment was sold by auction.

When the seeding had been done, we heard that Dr. Drury from England would be in Alexandrowka on July 7th and that all those who planned to move should be there at that time. Hundreds of people gathered on that day to be examined. Some were rejected because of trachoma (an eye disease), and others were accepted. After Dr. Drury checked our family, he looked at mother, smiled and said, "You and your four boys are in good health. You may get ready."

That evening I went to see my girl friend and told her the news. Tears came to her eyes as she thought about her family staying in Russia and ours leaving.

One day after I had been in Slavgorod on business, I stopped to see my Grandfather on my way home. He led me into his room where we could be by ourselves and we talked. He told me many of his life experiences, (several have been related earlier in this book). When I told him about Liesa he suggested that I should get married and take Liese along. I said, "I am going to be 19 and she is only 17. I think we are too young." However, he encouraged me to marry her rather than never see her again. But I could not see how I could do that. He prayed with me and then I left for home.

Soon we were told that we would be leaving Russia before harvest, and so I sold my shoe business and went back to work for John Reuter in Slavgorad. Harvest came and there was no sign of leaving the country.

One day I felt very restless at work and so I asked my master, "Would you allow me to take your bicycle and go home to see my family." He agreed to this and so the next day at about 1 p.m. I left for home. On the road I met some farmers hauling grain to Slavgorod. When they saw me they said, "Abram, hurry. Your mother is worrying about you. You are leaving tomorrow morning!" This was shocking news. I rode as fast as I could. I stopped at my Aunt Margarete's in Karatal and she quickly gave me a light lunch and then I was on my way again.

I was about 7 miles from home when darkness fell. I lost my way on the road and found myself in a plowed field. Suddenly hundreds of geese lifted themselves into the air with loud clapping. I was really frightened. Would I find the road again? I prayed, "Lord, help me. I want to see and comfort my mother."

As I stood there in the vast darkness I wondered which way I should go. I decided to go to the left and soon found myself on the right road again. By now I was soaking wet.

When I finally arrived at home, I saw that the wagon was loaded with all the belongings that we were

taking with us. I first went in to find mother and found her, lying on her bed and praying for me. I talked to her for a few minutes and then I heard the church choir singing farewell and comfort hymns outside. Mother and I were both crying. When they were finished singing, I went out to thank them for their kind Christian thoughts and deeds and said goodby to all of them.

My older friend John Ratzlaff wanted to spend some time alone with me. He said, "Abram, we might never see each other again and I feel I should introduce Jesus Christ to you and pray with you." We sat on the wagon for some time and talked and then he asked me to kneel with him and pray. John prayed a real intercessory prayer on my behalf. Then I wanted to pray and as I said, "O God!" it was as if the devil shut my mouth and I couldn't say another word. Finally we got up, hugged and kissed each other and he went on his way with the words, "I'll be praying for you."

When I got back in mother told me that the Rempel family was also planning to come to Slavgorad to see us off. I slept very little that night.

By four o'clock the next morning, with the bicycle loaded, we, together with a large caravan of others, were on our way. What a heartache! What memories as I looked back to my dear home village. Tears came to my eyes. I had to bury all my hopes and dreams, I felt, forever. I was quiet and could not speak. Other people were rejoicing.

We stopped in Karatal and said goodbye to Uncle Heinrich and Aunt Margarete and family. Mother had a sister, Mrs. Penner, in Slavgorad. We stayed at their house for one night while the men arranged the train cars for our living quarters to Riga.

In Slavgorad I met my girlfriend Liese Rempel again and we spent a great deal of time together. On the last evening I even took her to a movie, (the first one I had ever attended). It was a very funny movie and we were glad to be able to be together. In the spring of 1926 I had made her a very nice pair of dress shoes which she wore during that time in Slavgorad.

After spending two days arranging every detail, the train was ready to leave. Four hundred people

loaded into the box cars. There were four families per car. Hundreds had come to say goodbye, never to meet again. For many it was a very sad farewell, and I was no exception. My heart was in my throat. I was speechless for a long time, but gradually the pressure lifted. Liese and I parted with the understanding that I would do my utmost to have her come later, and we would remain true and faithful to each other, regardless how long it would take.

ON OUR WAY TO MOSCOW

We had been promised that we would receive our passports in Moscow, but when we arrived there after 10 weary days of travel, we were told that we would get them at the border in Sabege. After one day in Moscow, we were on our way to Sabege and the Red Gate. Many wondered whether we would actually get our passports. When the train stopped, we were searched and ordered to come and get our passports. We all breathed a sigh of relief, but those that handed the passports to us swore and cursed because so many young men were leaving the country. I'll never forget that experience.

Next we passed through the Red Gate and crossed the border into Latvia. Up to this point we had had to pay our own way. From Latvia on, the CPR picked us up, fed and transported us to our destination, in Canada on credit at 6%.

We stayed in the port city of Riga for several days. Everyone had to go through a de-lousing exercise. Many men and women lost all their hair because of lice. All the clothes went through a process of disinfection and everyone had to take a bath. I had enough money left for a hair cut, so I went to a barber and he gave me a good trim. I was able to keep my hair. From the barbers I went into the town and to my surprise found a number of shoe and clothing stores which were managed by Jews. I offered them a deal that I would bring them customers if they would give me a commission. They promised me the commission and so I went back and forth with different families. With my commission I bought a nice hat and rubber footwear which I also used later in Canada.

After spending a few days in Riga we boarded a

CPR ship named Baltara, which was to take us across the Baltic Sea, through the Kiel Canal and across the North Sea to England. As the ship left port we were sitting at our tables ready to eat. The brass band was playing. I thought, "This will be a great trip. My first ride on a ship!" The food looked, smelled and tasted great. Several miles from shore the boat began to rock and sway and before I knew it, all I had eaten flipped back out unannounced! It went all over my suit and my appetite was gone. I excused myself and went into the cabin to clean up. The smell of the diesel fuel from the engines and the sea air did not agree with me and I spent most of the journey in my cabin.

However I did enjoy the cruise along Wilhem's Canal where we could see the farms, factories and buildings in Germany. Denmark was on the other side and we could see farms and all kinds of machinery. It gave us new hope to see life around us again.

In London, England we underwent a more thorough medical examination. Our family came through in good health, but some others had to stay behind for medical treatment. In England we were treated very well. The dining rooms had long tables nicely decorated and the food was very good. What we had missed out on the ship Baltara we gained in England.

After a few days in London we were taken by train to Southampton and there we boarded the large ship "Monclare" to cross the great Atlantic Ocean.

MY VOW TO GOD

During this trip I constantly felt like a sinner condemned to Hell. I found no joy anywhere. I was also very homesick. Our cabin was below the water level. The ocean was stormy and raging. Rumors were going around about a shipwreck.

Many people, after a good meal, would go out on the deck, bend over the rail and feed the fish the same food they had eaten. I was so sick for three days and nights that I made a vow to God, saying, "If you bring me safely to Canada where I can put my feet on solid ground, I will give my life to you." I also said to myself that I would never cross the sea again unless God called me to a mission field. God heard me

and took me up on that promise.

Mother was very sick in her cabin and couldn't breathe. The captain was notified and he gave orders that mother was to occupy his bedroom upstairs. A few men carried her up to the room where she was looked after. Had mother died, she would have been buried at sea.

I envied the young boys who could run and play and eat all the food. They had the greatest fun. Somehow the motion didn't seem to affect them as much as it did older people. I don't think I ate more than six meals on the whole journey across the Atlantic. Many others were also sick throughout the journey. I don't know how we would have survived without the smoked ham and roasted buns that we had brought along from Russia.

As I became accustomed to the rocking of the ship and the smell of the sea and engines, I got up and found some of my friends. Together we explored the great ship from end to end and from top to bottom where all the engines were. It was all very new and interesting to me to see how human ingenuity could plan and make all the parts that were needed to make such a huge ship to carry such a load of people with all their cargo across the vast ocean.

I believe it was on the seventh day that we heard that land was in site. This gave us new hope that we would make it across. My brother John's children were sick with the measles so his wife Helena, their daughter Anna, sons John and Isaak had to disembark at St. John's where they were taken to the hospital until the children were well again. The rest of us disembarked in Montreal on November 21, 1926. I shall never forget that experience. When I walked off the ship and my feet were on solid ground again, the Holy Spirit reminded me of the vow I had made. I said, "Yes Lord, just give me a little more time."

In Montreal we boarded the CPR train for a two day and two night journey which took us through Ontario to Osborne, Manitoba, a town about 30 miles west of Winnipeg.

On the way through Ontario I noticed the scattered farms with tall barns and silos and small houses. There were no villages like we had had in

Russia. At different places we saw dark red earth, rocks and hills which were all very new to me. We all enjoyed our meals on the train. They were sandwiches and pickled sardines from tin cans, which was all very tastey, but also new to us.

A NEW LIFE STARTING IN CANADA

When we left our homeland we had no idea as to where we would land and start a new home in Canada. We had no relatives and no address to go to. When we boarded the train in Montreal we were told that those families that did not have a fixed destination were to go as far as Rosturn Saskatchewan. My brother John spoke to Jakob Wedel on the train who gave him the address of Peter Suderman who had left for Mexico in 1925 and who had after a few months moved to Osborne, Manitoba. We decided that we would go to their place. I was especially excited since the Suderman's boys, John and Henry, were my friends.

During the winter of 1924 - 1925 when I was in my last year of training in Slavgarod, my friend John Suderman attended a Bible school in Dovelukanova Ufa, close to the Ural Mountains. He had enjoyed his studies very much and was a very bright student. When he came home in summer of 1925 his parents had decided to go to Mexico. I was home at that time and one evening after supper, just before they were going to leave, John came over to see me. He asked me to come and spend the evening with him. I was not quite sure what he had in mind, but I had a hunch that he wanted to talk to me about my spiritual condition. He had been a Christian and a baptised member of the Church for a few years and now, after his year in Bible School, he was on fire for God and he felt that he should talk to me.

We had a good evening together, walking down the back lane in the evening. He let me feel his compassion for me and wanted me to make a decision that night. Since I had the tie with Liese Rempel who was also not a born again Christian, I could not make a decision. After he prayed with me we parted, thinking that we might never see each other again.

And now we were on our way to the Sudermans. I was thinking and wishing that when we got there John would certainly help me find Christ and find rest for my restless soul.

When the train stopped at Osborne, Manitoba we got off and took all our belongings off the train. But Osborne had no buildings except a grain elevator. There was no place for shelter. No depot or station to walk into and warm up. Here we stood beside the tracks and the elevator as the train tooted and left.

All around us the ground was covered with 8 to 10 inches of snow. We could see a few farms away in the distance. My heart sank within me, to think that this was the beloved Canada that people had talked about. I felt like going back to Russia.

My brother John asked the man in charge at the elevator where farmer Suderman lived. He pointed north and said, "There is Farmer Suderman!" So mother, Jakob and my brother Dietrich stayed with our belongings in the cold and snow and John, Peter and I started walking across the field covered with 10 inches of snow, with our dress shoes on. After we had walked a distance we looked to the right and saw two horses and a wagon driven by a man on the road. Since all the land near Osborne is very flat, the road had been raised. As we saw the team coming we decided to cut across the field and meet this man. Again brother John asked him, "Where farmer Suderman?" "Oh," he said (in German), "are you Mennonites? Are you immigrants to Canada?" We said, "Yes, we just arrived and all our belongings are at the elevator." He stopped his horses and asked us to climb into the wagon and said that he would take us to the Sudermans, but first he needed to unload the wheat that he had in the wagon. "I will show you how we do this in Canada," he said. "We don't need a shovel for this work."

By now we were curious. He stopped on the scale by the elevator. The man from the elevator came and lifted the end board off of the box, and the grain rushed out. He took some samples of grain to test the quality and then he pulled a lever. The front part of the wagon to which the horses were still hitched, raised up high and the back part dropped down. We were amazed as all the grain gushed out in no time at

all. The man pulled the lever again and the wagon was flat again, ready to drive away.

With the wagon emptied of grain, we were able to load all our belongings into the wagon of this dear Mr. John Wiens. He drove us to the Peter Suderman's farm.

What a surprise for the Suderman's that morning as we stormed into their house. They had no idea that we were coming to Canada and here we were. The men had just come home from threshing in the fields and Mother Suderman was preparing dinner. In one way we felt embarrassed to take them by surprise, but they received us with open arms and welcomed us to Canada and to their home.

After dinner the men went out again to work at threshing while we stayed in the house and dried our socks and shoes that had become wet from walking through the snow.

The Suderman's were so kind to us. They allowed us to stay at their house. They gave us their living room to live in. When evening came, John, Henry and I talked. John said that there was nothing like Canada. They had been in Mexico for only a few months and felt that this was not what they had expected, so they had emigrated to Canada. This was the land of freedom and possibilities. "Here," he said, "you can make money." That night I went to bed disappointed. I had thought that John would talk to me about accepting the Lord and now he was only interested in making money.

WHY WERE THEY HARVESTING AND THRESHING IN NOVEMBER?

In 1926 the farmers in Canada had a good harvest, but when threshing time came, it rained so much that the farmers could not reap the grain. The soil was like gumbo. All stooks and stubble were frozen solid in three to four inches of water and then snow drifts had covered the stooks. Now the farmer could get to his fields and so he shoveled the snow from the stooks, cut the sheaves off the ice, loaded it onto the hayrack sleigh and carted the grain to the threshing machine in the field. The Suderman's didn't need any help, but their neighbour, Mr. Harder needed one man.

The next day I started working at the Harders.

I was to get there for breakfast, but when I got to their place, the men had already left for the field. Mrs. Harder greeted me very friendly and asked me to have my breakfast. She handed me cooked porridge, sugar, whole milk, cream, toast and coffee. This was my first and never to be forgotten breakfast in Canada. I enjoyed it so much. It had such a rich taste that I wished that I could have it every day of my life. (After 59 years in Canada, this is still my favourite breakfast. I have only cut out the whole milk and use 2% instead, with no cream. I have also cut out the toast and instead of coffee I now drink "Caf-Lib" which is a wholesome beverage without caffeine.)

After breakfast I started to get ready for work, but I only had light clothes, no work boots, only the dress shoes I had made for myself just before leaving for Canada. The rubber shoes that I had purchased in Riga were not high enough for the deep snow, so I put each foot into a sack and tied the sack with twine around my calf. Then I left for work in the fields.

When I arrived in the field, Mr. Harder greeted me very kindly and handed me a shovel, and fork and put me to work. Everyone on the threshing crew could see that I was not prepared for this kind of work and weather, but they were patient with me as I tried my best. Going back to the house for lunch and supper was a pleasant experience. The food was good, the house was warm and the faces were friendly. For the night I went back to the Sudermans where I dried my shoes, socks and pants in preparation for the next days work. I worked for the Harders for about five days and was paid \$5.00 per day.

During this time rumors had spread that immigrants had arrived and that some young men were looking for work. Soon arrangements were made by telephone that my brother Jakob would go to Peter Goosens, and I would go to Peter D. Loewens at Rosenort, Manitoba and help with the chores. It was not that these farmers actually needed us since they had enough boys at home to do the necessary work, but they did it to help us out so that we had a place to stay. We had arranged that for the months of December, January and February we would not be paid, but would get room and board only. Starting in March

1927, we would be paid \$35.00 per month right through the summer and until the harvest was done. This was brother Jakob's first experience away from home. Mother, John, Peter and Dietrich stayed at Suderman's until Christmas, when Helena came and joined John with the children from St. John's. When they arrived our family found a home with the Rev. Jakob Penners in Domain, Manitoba. It was a one room attic where they could cook for themselves and could sleep.

The Suderman's had a very primitive farm. The buildings had been put up in early 1926. They had no electricity, but they had a telephone.

When we arrived at these Canadian Mennonites, we were amazed at what we saw. The Peter Loewen's had a large barn with twenty-two horses. Several of the horses were clydes, which I had seen in England. They had fourteen cows, pigs in a pig barn and a special barn for chickens. A distance from the barn was a very large pond full of water. Inside the barn was a large water basin that had a pump connected to it. A gas engine pumped the water from the pond into the basin. There were electric lights throughout the barn. The house was very large with a full basement. They had electric milk and cream seperators and electric butter churners. Different varieties of apples were stored in wooden barrels and there was a special place to store garden vegetables. The main floor of the house had a large foyer, a large kitchen and a larger dining room. The dining room had a long table and many chairs, as well as a china cabinet. From the dining room you went through two fancy glass doors into a beautifully furnished living room. There was also one bedroom and a bathroom on the main floor. Upstairs were six bedrooms and one of these fully furnished bedrooms was given to me. I felt like a poor beggar living with millionaires. The first few days I worked in the barn with my good shoes and low rubbers. I didn't like to wear these shoes for the work, so they gave me a pair of old rubber boots with laces and also overalls to wear. They felt very strange to me, but were much more practical.

IN CANADA AND IN A NEW ENVIRONMENT

The Loewen's oldest son, also named Peter, was a

very clever young man. He had married Elizabeth Bartel, a lovely, friendly young lady a few months earlier and they occupied one bedroom upstairs as well. Peter had done all the electrical work when they had built all the buildings on the farm.

Their son Bernhard was twenty-three and took an interest in me. In our free time between doing chores he showed me all around the farm and explained how they used all their farm implements. He also tried to teach me some English which I thought I would never learn. He also taught me how to handle their horses in English, since he said, "In Canada we speak to the horses in English." A new world had opened before my eyes and I knew that I had much to learn if I wanted to be successful in Canada.

Their daughter Margarete was thirty year old. She worked together with her mother in the household work and in preparing all the meals. Their youngest daughter was Dora. She was fourteen.

I can recall my first meal at the Loewen's. Mr. Loewen sat at the end of the table and he asked me to sit next to him. This was also a new custom for me, since in the old country, the hired help would sit at the lower end of the table or at designated places in a different room.

Mr. Loewen was elderly and found it difficult at time to put on his shoes or slippers. If I noticed that he was having trouble, I would quickly help him, which he appreciated alot. It didn't take too long until I felt at ease and at home there.

In the evenings when I was alone I read the Bible like I never had before. Every night I searched the scriptures and prayed for peace and forgiveness, and yet I could not grasp this finished work of Christ by faith. It seemed as though my mind was closed and blank to the Word of God. I read in the Old and New Testament, but nothing happened. The hand of God was heavy upon me. I said, "Lord, on the ship I vowed to you that I would give my life to you. Now I am calling on you to please show me how to believe." At times I felt I was worn out before God in prayer and had to go to bed without experiencing a new birth.

On Sundays I went to church. There I usually met my brother Jakob who had been a Christian since he was fourteen. We sat together in church and in the

congregational singing he sang tenor and I sang bass. The whole congregation sang in unison, which was strange to us. Most German songs were familiar to us, since we had done alot of singing in Russian and in German at home. When we sang tenor and bass, the people would look around at us and wondered about these Russian immigrants. Why did they sing so differently? I found out that these people had come from Russia in 1872 and had joined the Holdeman Church in Canada. They believed in the new birth, baptism by sprinkling and once men became church memebers they had to let their beards grow. The girls had to wear a kerchief when they became members. They didn't have any instruments. The radio was considered worldly, but they were allowed to read the newspaper to keep up to date in world affairs. They had the nicest farms, tractors and cars. I had the impression that they were a clean living people.

One evening Ben took me to their neighbours who had a radio. It was a large box with gadgets attached. Only one person could listen at a time with an earphone. Those were the years of the beginnings of different inventions. How different it is today!

FINALLY, MY CONVERSION

On February 10, 1927 I phoned my brother Jakob, who lived four miles from me, and told him that I was lonesome for the family. I wondered if he would like to go with me on a short visit. He agreed. The Loewen's gave me a horse and a sleigh and I picked Jakob up for the twenty mile ride.

The next day was February 11th. That morning God spoke to me and said, "This is the day for you to make a decision." I said, "God, I have read the Bible; I have prayed earnestly; I have cried and shed tears because of my sinful life and nothing has happened." When I picked Jakob up he had no idea what was going on inside of me. He just wanted to talk, but I had no interest in talking. There were two powers fighting deep within me. The Holy Spirit said, "This is the day, and don't put it off." Rev. 3:20 "Behold I stand at the door and knock, if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with me." The devil said,

"Abe, you are still young. You have lots of time. You can wait." This struggle went on all day. I felt very burdened and condemned.

When we arrived at the Penner's, where our family lived, they were happy to see us. All of us had something to say about our first impressions in Canada. Before going to bed my brother John took the Bible, read a portion of scripture and made some remarks. We all kneeled to pray. Then the Holy Spirit said, "This is the hour when I will reveal myself to you; when you call upon me." First John prayed, then Helena, then my mother. She prayed for me as she always did. Then Peter prayed. By then I was trembling and shaking all over because of the struggle that was going on deep inside me. When Peter said, "Amen", I burst out and couldn't hold it any longer. I said, "God, I am the greatest sinner. I know I am condemned. I plead for forgiveness. Please Lord Jesus, reveal yourself to me and give me peace in my heart and soul." As I knelt there before the cross crying, pleading, Jesus spoke to me. He said, "Abram, now I see that you are sincere. Your sins are forgiven. I died for you that you might have everlasting life." This was such a clear voice speaking to me that my doubts were gone. Peace came into my restless heart and a surge of cleansing power came through me from the top of my head to the sole of my feet. Now I knew I was a child of God and the Holy Sprit had come to live in my heart. I thanked God for this miracle of grace. By now the whole family and I were crying tears of joy. When I said "Amen", we all rose to our feet and everyone wanted to be the first to put their arms around me and express their feelings of joy for answered prayer. Oh, how happy my dear mother was that she had lived to see that day when I had come to know the Lord.

The next morning I was still so happy that I could have jumped to the ceiling. I went into the barn and told Mr. Penner what had happened the previous night; that I had found peace and forgiveness in the Lord. He said he had noticed that something unusual was happening upstairs. He too rejoiced with me.

Soon after breakfast Jakob and I said goodbye to the family and left for our homes. On the way I

wanted to stop at Osborne and tell the Suderman's about what God had done for me the night before. They rejoiced with me also. My friend John took me into the living room, closed the door, took the Bible and read Psalm 32 to me. I said, "John, that is exactly my experience." These were the words, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity and in whose spirit there is no guile. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me. My moisture is turned into the drought of summer, Selah. I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. For this shall everyone that is godly pray unto Thee in a time when Thou mayest be found. Surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him. Thou art my hiding place; Thou shalt preserve me from trouble; Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go. I will guide thee with mine eye. Be not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding; whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee. Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart."

This Psalm was such a comfort and joy to me as we meditated on it. Here I could see that David was also human, as a King of Israel he had fallen deeply into sin, according to 2 Samuel 11 and 12. In Psalm 51 David pleads for forgiveness and cleansing and Psalm 32 is the record of the confession, the forgiveness received and the blessedness of his complete restoration. In verse 1 David is giving instruction. He says that he had made his confession to God, was forgiven, and had found complete restoration. He had found shelter in God and was given a song of deliverance. This Psalm was a balm to my heart and John and I thanked God for this wonderful experience in my life.

My friend, whoever you are and wherever you are

as you read these lines, believe me, that if you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour, you can lift up your heart in great joy and praise to God. If you still don't have this peace, and the assurance, you may have it. Jesus says in Matthew 11:28, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." If you think you are too great a sinner, read Isaih 1:18 where God says, "Come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

The invitation still stands and Christ is still waiting. Please do not delay. You have nothing to loose, but you have heaven and all it has to offer to gain.



Four Friesen brothers, taken in Canada in 1927.

GOOD NEWS FROM HOME

Before we left John handed me a letter and asked me to read it. From the envelope I could see that it was from Russia. I opened it and sure enough, it was from my girlfriend. This was the first news from home. In it she told me about her deep loneliness. But it also contained the best news I could have heard. She wrote that she had found forgiveness of sin and had peace in her heart. She wished that I would also take that step. This made me so happy and thankful to God for his leading in our lives.

When I got back to the Loewens I told them all that had happened and they also rejoiced with me. What a contrast from the battle of the day before. Now I had stillness and peace in my soul. "Dear God, I thank you even today for your patience, love, grace and mercy and for accepting me as your child. Forever shall my mouth be full of praise to you."

Several weeks later the church that Jakob and I were attending had a week of evangelistic meetings. They had invited a special speaker from the United States to preach in English and one of their own ministers preached in German. The preacher from the States was on fire for God. I liked the way he preached. I sensed that he had a real compassion for lost souls even though I could only understand a few words. A good number of young and older people accepted the Lord that week. On the last evening of the meetings, (a Sunday night), they gave opportunity for personal testimonies. Many people stood and told the congregation what God had done for them in the past week. Since I was a new Christian and had never given a public testimony in a church, I felt the Spirit moving within me encouraging me to tell my conversion experience. I obeyed immediately. I stood up and poured out my heart before God and the congregation. As I was speaking men with their beards turned around to see who this stranger was that was speaking.

As I related my life experiences and how I had found the Lord I noticed tears running down their cheeks. There was hardly a dry eye in that congregation. When I sat down a wonderful peace

flooded into my soul. Shortly after that experience they had a baptism and asked if I would like to be baptised as well. I told them that I appreciated their concern, but I would rather join the church of my background. "Baptism by immersion".

MY FIRST TEMPTATION BY SATAN

At the Loewen's my first job each day was to clean the horse and cow barns. When the manure cart was fully loaded, I harnessed the two biggest clydes that we always used for this work. As I threw the harness over it came back down. I tried again and the same thing happened. Before I was saved I would swear and curse when something like this happened and now Satan was tempting me to do it again. With God's help I could say, "Lord help me and give me victory". With another try I had success. I thanked the Lord for helping me. I have learned throughout my Christian life to be on the alert against the evil forces and to be ready to combat them, knowing that Christ can give the victory.

BUYING A FARM WITHOUT MONEY

It was the last week of March in 1927 when my brother John arrived at the Loewens with a sleigh and a team of horses. He had just come from Peter Goosens and had talked with Jakob and now he wanted to break the news to me as well. He told me that there was a 400 acre farm for sale. It had a two storey house and a barn, six horses, four cows and some farm machinery. We could buy it with no downpayment. All we needed was \$1.00 to cover the legal work. But before we could purchase this farm we needed extra money to buy four more horses and some farm equipment as well as furniture for the house. He also told me that Jakob had agreed to work for Peter Goosen's for two summers and for that Mr. Goosen would pay him \$500.00 in advance. If I would be willing to work for Mr. Loewen for one summer without any wages except for what I needed for shoes and clothing, then he would ask Mr. Loewen for \$250.00 advanced wages on my behalf. Both Mr. Loewen and I agreed to this proposal and John left for home, happy and with \$750.00.

And so the farm was bought in three shares. The three names of the title were John, Peter and Abram. Jakob was still too young to sign legal papers. You can imagine what this meant to us.

We wanted our families to become established and we felt the best place we could do this was on the farm. We still had our "Reiseschuld" (CPR travel debts) because we had come to Canada on credit. We wanted to pay that off as quickly as possible. We hoped that if the farm yielded a good crop we would be able to pay back the debt. Jakob and I cheerfully worked without any cash coming to us since we knew that mother and the family had a place to live and we also had a place to call home. My wages at Loewen's was \$35.00 per month and it started from the 1st of March 1927 and went until the end of October. In March we shipped a number of carloads of wheat which was hard work. December, January and February I worked for room and board alone.

For me farm work was not easy since it was not my interest. I was trained as a shoemaker and would have loved to continue in that line of work. But coming to a new country and not knowing the language, I did the next best thing and for me that meant farming. Most of my thoughts were overseas, remembering all the good old days, and above all, my girlfriend. Many times while we were having dinner and everyone was quiet, Elisabeth would say, "Nah Abram is in Russia again", and how right she was. As a young married woman she felt very sorry for me and at time she tried to cheer me up. I wrote letters home every month and also received a letter each month. These helped to keep me going.

MY FIRST SUMMER IN CANADA

When we had arrived in November 1926, signs of winter had been everywhere. In April 1927 the Loewen's hired three more helpers for seeding. One was Abram Penner, who had come to Canada in 1925 and had already worked for the Loewens for a summer. When he came I found out that he was also from Siberia and from our neighbour village, Kleefeld. The other two helpers were Harder boys from Osborne, the town where I had worked during my first week in Canada. They

were Abram (15 years old) and Jakob (14 years old) Harder.

The first morning during breakfast old Mr. Loewen said, "We now have a problem on our hands. We have three Abrams. What shall we call you so that you don't all come running at once?" He suggested that since Abram Penner had been in Canada for a year already, he would be called Abe. However, Abram Penner refused. He said, "I am Abram". So Mr. Loewen asked me if they could call me Abe. I said Yes, if that solved their problem. The youngest Abram was called Abrama. Now we all knew our names and after breakfast they sent us to the fields to work.

They had left some barley and flax in stooks over the winter since it could not be harvested because of the heavy rain. Now we had to turn the sheeves over, spread them out to dry and before we could seed, they needed to be harvested. While turning those sheeves, we found mice, mice and more mice. Some were in a nest with their young and others were running all over. In all my life I had not seen so many mice. We killed them by the thousands with a fork.

For seeding the hired men had to work with horses, while Peter and Ben used the tractor. They had a John Deere and a Fordson as well as a big Rumbley tractor, that could pull an eleven shear plow. This was mostly used for threshing.

Old Mr. Loewen often went into the attic and watched us work in the fields through a telescope. He also saw us resting sometimes and if he thought we had rested too long, he would admonish us at the table later. That made us feel very uncomfortable, but maybe he was right. At times we felt that the horses needed a rest as much as we did. Old Mr. Loewen died in his home in July, 1927. We all attended his funeral.

All four of the hired men came from Russia and we all got along really well. We spoke the same language and were all away from home.

On Sundays when the Loewens had gone away, we often took a swim in the large pond. At times Abram Penner would start the John Deere tractor and would drive it around the yard. I admired Abram. He even learned to read the comics in the paper in English. I

thought that he must be very smart. I didn't think that I would be able to do that in one years time.

Sometimes when I was really lonesome I would take the guitar and sing and play the songs we had sung so often in Russia. Songs like: "Wo sind sie nun die Gespiele, meiner schoenen Jugendzeit, oft gedenke ich der vielen deren Lieb mich einst erfreut. An den Hematlichen Auen, sah ich Blumen mir erbluehen, Traenenperlen niedertauen, sie sind hin sie sind hin, Traenenperlen niedertauen, sie sind hin, sie sind hin."

I always had hope in my heart that we would meet again someday. I sang the above song and many others as well. It was good medicine for my lonely heart. When I was really burdened and lonesome I went to a solitary place and poured my heart and feelings out to God. He truly was my source of comfort and strength. I remember seeing my family only twice that summer. On October 31st my term of work ended and I went home for good.

HOME AT LAST

My greatest joy was in being with mother again. She was not strong or well and I was able to help her in many ways by washing, baking, mending and also in farm work.

OUR FIRST MEAL IN A RESTAURANT

In 1928 our large sow gave birth to nineteen piggllets. We raised them carefully and in February 1929, Peter, Jake and I took seven 250 lb. pigs to Swifts in Winnipeg in a box sleigh. Everything went well until we came to a railroad track that we had to cross. Snow covered the ground, except for where the tracks were. We stopped and wondered how the horses would be able to pull this load across the tracks. We saw a train coming in a distance, but we thought we could make it over before it came to this crossing. So we urged the horses to go forward. As the sleigh landed with its cast iron runners on the tracks, the horses stopped. This frightened us. The train came closer and was blowing the whistle. We tried to help by pushing the sleigh, shouting at the horses. We had

barely pushed the sleigh over the tracks as the train went whistling by. "Wow! that was close!" we thought.

After we had sold the pigs and got our money, we took the horses to Eaton's horse stall and fed them their dinner. Then the three of us looked around for a place to eat. We found a little restaurant; stopped, looked around and saw a few people eating there. As we stood at the lunch counter a young blonde waitress came up and asked us what we would like to order. None of us could speak English well and so we looked at each other to see who would speak up first. But we were all quiet. After standing and waiting a few minutes, she became restless. Finally I said to Peter, "You tell her what we want." "No," he said, "you tell her." "No," I said, "I can't speak English. Na, Jakob, you surely must have learned some English working for the Goosens. You ask." "No," Jakob said, "I can't ask for a meal." As this discussion was going on, people began to look up and wonder what was going on. Finally the waitress pointed to the menu on the wall. That didn't help any because none of us could read English. Then I looked around to see what the men in the restaurant were eating. I noticed that one had a nice helping of food, but I could not quite make out what it was. I also didn't know how to ask for it. Finally, pointing at the man and looking at the waitress, I said, "Give me porridge like that fella". The man looked up puzzled. The waitress turned around with a grin on her face, trying hard not to laugh and left for the kitchen. I am sure she had a good laugh when she told the cook about those greenhorns. But we were completely serious. We sat down and waited for our order. Finally she came and brought us each the same dish. It was meat, vegetables and potatoes with gravy. To me it had looked like the man had ice cream in his plate.

Thirteen years later when my sister-in-law from Toronto came to visit us, we talked about funny things that had happened in our early years in Canada. I told her about this experience, mentioning that I had thought the man had ice cream in his plate. She said, "Maybe it was a sunday". "No," I said, "This happened on a Monday!" What she had meant was a sunday ice cream dish, which I had never heard about. All this

helped to make the experience even funnier and we had a good laugh about it again and again.

It is true that one can learn from the mistakes that we make in life. Now we know better.

MY BAPTISM

One Sunday morning Rev. Jakob Penner stopped at our farm to pick up mother and myself on his way to the morning worship service at the Rev. Penner's farm in Oak Bluff. After the service he came to me and said that we would all be staying at the Penner's for lunch. After lunch there would be an opportunity for baptism candidates to give their testimonies.

By this time I had already been a Christian for two years and had been waiting for someone to approach me with this question. He told me that there were already three people who wanted to get baptised and so I told him that I would like to join them.

That afternoon, Tina Penner, her brother Abram Penner, Peter Dueck and I gave our testimonies to a small group of believers. We were told that the following Sunday we would give our testimony to a large congregation in the morning and then after we had lunch we would be baptised in the La Salle River.

This event took place on July 24, 1929 in a large empty machine shed on the Dahl Brothers farm in LaSalle. It was a very blessed day for all of us. The weather was great and Rev. Jakob Penner baptised us in the LaSalle River. We were accepted into the MB Church in LaSalle Manitoba. It was a step of obedience according to Mark 16:16, which made me feel closer to heaven.

1930

In the spring of 1930 I told my brother John that I would like to quit working on our farm and either go to Winnipeg or else hire myself out to a farmer, since I saw no future for myself in farming. The farm that we had purchased had been neglected for years. The land was like gumbo and had many thistles. There had been crop failures and the price for grain had been low. I also did not feel that I had been born to be a farmer.

This idea was not well received by John. He said that Jakob and I had made it possible to buy the farm and that he did not want me to leave empty-handed. He suggested that Jakob and I should rent a 480 acre neighbouring farm for three years. He suggested that we could buy a new John Deere tractor and then we could work the two farms together. He thought that Jakob and his wife (he had found a girl that he was planning to marry), mother, Dietrich and I could move to the new farm. Peter was also engaged to Anna Dueck and was planning a wedding for after seeding. John and Peter would work their farm. So we discussed this in a brotherly fashion and decided to follow through on the plan.

And so we moved over to the rented farm that had some horses, cows, pigs and chickens. Jakob married in April just before seeding time and we all hoped for the best.

Jakob's wife, Anna Ratzlaff, was a kind, loving person. She and mother got along very well in the household. We new Anna well from the old country. She was the granddaughter of the Herman Klassen's who had been our neighbours in Gnadenheim.

Since the price of grain had dropped even more sharply in 1930 it was hardly worth our while to ship the oats and barley. We got 10 to 11 cents a bushel for oats and barley and 30 cents a bushel for wheat. I was very disappointed.

So I approached Jakob and said that I knew that the farm had been rented for three years, but if he didn't mind, I would leave everything to him and would go to Winnipeg to find work. I asked him to allow me one load of sweet clover in sheeves and a load of barley chop. All the rest could be his if he would look after mother and Dietrich. He didn't like the idea, but I knew I had had enough of farming and knew that farming would never be my vocation. Deep within me I felt that I was not happy. I needed more fellowship with others and also believed that I had a different calling. So he gave me his blessing and in November 1930 I left the farm, with my clover and barley chop which I sold to friends who had some chickens and a cow in North Kildonan.

ABRAM THE BACHELOR

In 1928 a Mennonite Settlement had started in North Kildonan and I knew several families who lived there. About five or six families from Gnadenheim, Siberia had moved there too. They were the Johann A. Klassens, Abram Wittenbergs, Heinrich Wittenbergs, our neighbours, the Herman Klassens and my friend and distant relative Daniel Wittenberg, who had come from South Russia, through Moscow and Germany to Canada. I had also learned to know many others in North Kildonan in the past years.

All the families were poor and they all made a new start in life. Some had a few daughters who found housework in Winnipeg and were able to give the money to their parents to help ease the load.

In 1929 a mass migration took place from Russia. Thousands of Mennonites left their homes, went to Moscow and tried to get into Canada. Among them was also my girlfriend, Liese Rempel, together with two of her married sisters and their families. When she wrote and told me where she was, I tried to make arrangements for her to come to Canada, through different municipalities and agencies, as well as through Mr. David Toews who headed the Mennonite Colonization Board of Immigration to Canada. But all the doors seemed closed.

Finally Liese got as far as Germany. This raised my hopes. Some had already come to Canada. Our correspondence increased and we thought that we certainly would see each other again. Then she wrote that both of her sisters had left for Brazil. This was very difficult for her. Her mother and the rest of her family was still in Siberia and her two sisters were in Brazil and I was in Canada. This brought many tears for days. The following day she had been called for an examination for Canada, but since her eyes were so red from crying, she was rejected. Now she was all alone, staying with her relatives in Germany. Again I tried to make arrangements for her to come, but it again ended in failure.

Then Hitler made an arrangement with Stalin that all families that had been broken up should be brought together in Germany. During the early 1930's times were very difficult in Russia. There had been crop

failures and there was starvation throughout Russia. People hunted for gophers, mice or rabbits just to survive.

In 1933 - 1934 Liese's mother and family arrived in Germany, very poorly clothed and barefoot. Since Canada was closed to the Rempel family, they decided to go to Brasil and Liese stayed in Germany. When the family arrived in Argentina, their health was examined and they were rejected entry because of trachoma. This meant that they had to go back to Germany to have their eyes healed.

Again I received a letter from her that the family had returned to Germany and after they were healed they would be going to Brasil. Now the question. Should she go along with her mother to Brazil or should she wait longer in Germany. Prayerfully I considered this decision, and came to the conclusion that it would be best for her to go with her family, and if possible, things would improve. I would either send for her to come to Canada, or I would follow her to Brazil. So she went along and helped her mother and family get settled in the virgin bushland in Brazil, a very poor and hard beginning.



Abram the bachelor, 1930.

Back to my bachelor life in Kildonan. The money from selling the clover and barley was adequate for me to make a \$5.00 downpayment on a 75 x 100 foot lot, and also to buy a \$20.00 load of lumber. Mr. Johann A. Klassen was like a father to me. He offered me a

room in his house and he even helped me build my little 14 x 16 foot house. It had three windows and one door. It was just a shell of a house, with studs and boards on the outside and a cedar shingle roof. There was no insulation and the inside was completely unfinished. When I finished the shell, I bought an old cook stove for \$3.00, made a table and bench and had a single bed and some cooking utensils.

The first winter I made my living by repairing some shoes or making felt "schlorren" (slippers). But inspite of the primitive home, I was a happy man.

The group of settlers in Kildonan decided to build a church in 1930. It was only a small church and very primitive, but we had a place of worship. No one had electricity in their homes in those days.

During that first winter in Kildonan, I became close friends with Daniel Wittenberg. Soon after his arrival in Canada, both he and his wife accepted Christ as their Saviour and he and I were on fire for God. We often prayed together and had a desire to serve the Lord. We often met to sing familiar hymns or to learn new ones. By this time I was able to read some English and so we practised English songs that would speak to a sinners heart. When Rev. C.N. Hiebert, the City Missionary, found out that we liked to sing, he asked us to sing duets at his services. This gave us a reason to practise. We were glad to be able to help in this way. We were soon asked to sing at the Sunday evening service or at the Wednesday night Bible study at the Elmwood M.B. Church, where Rev. C.N. Hiebert was the pastor.

In 1931 Mr. & Mrs. Henry Bartsch from Saskatchewan felt the call to go to Africa as missionaries. They had both graduated from Winkler Bible School and were stranded in Winnipeg because of lack of funds. Since this was during the depression and most people had no jobs or money, Dan and I decided to work on a program that we could do in the Kildonan Church. We wanted to raise an offering for the Bartsch's. We practised a number of songs and each recited a poem which related to the need in the world for missionaries. The poems were heartwarming.

The following song is one which I found in my possessions which I translated from the German 54 years ago.

THE CALL BACK TO CHINA

We heard the call from the mouth of the Lord,
Go ye to China, because I send you there.
Once more to bring the message of the Lord,
To change the heathen's heart and mind.

Chorus: Go, go, I send you there
I will protect, and also
look after your needs.

We heard the call from missionaries afar
Come help us work in the vineyard of the Lord.
We're waiting and praying for you to come soon:
Before Jesus from heaven the trumpet will blow.

Chorus: Come, come and don't linger long,
We are longing to welcome you
here very soon.

Much danger awaits us, and hardships too,
Til finally obtained is this glorious aim.
But souls to rescue shall be alone
The aim of our going to China be.

Chorus: Yes, yes, yes, that alone
The aim of our going to China be.

Therefore, farewell all ye loved ones gathered here,
The Lord is calling us and the brethren from far.
The parting is painful and afraid is the heart.
But please do remember, we're answering God's call.

Chorus: Praying, watching, Jesus alone
Will comfort, refresh us,
and help us alone.

And shall we not see you in this world anymore
We'll see you all soon in the air with the Lord.
For soon it'll resound, that Jesus is coming
The signs of the time say He's coming soon.

Chorus: Come, Come, Jesus my Lord
All those you have saved,
are waiting for you.

After singing and reciting the poems, I preached my first message. I spoke on Acts 13:44 - 49 where we are told about the Jew's opposition to the message

that Paul and Barnabas preached. Then Paul and Barnabas became bold and said that it was necessary that the work of God should first have been spoken to the Jews, but seeing that they put it from them, they showed they were unworthy of everlasting life and so Paul and Barnabas were turning to the Gentiles. They said, "For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light to the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the Word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the Word of the Lord was published throughout all the region."

The Lord gave grace that night and I spoke with boldness about the need for the gospel in heathen lands. The church was filled with young and old alike and when the collection plate was passed around, the missionary offering was \$5.00. Now, the reader might say, that the evening was a flop or a failure. But you must remember that you could rent a room including heat for \$5.00 a month.

The next day Dan and I walked the four miles to and from Winnipeg, in order to save the streetcar fare, and delivered the \$5.00 to the Bartschs. They were living in an upstairs room with only a double bed and a guitar on the bed. They lived there with their baby. We told them the story of how we had raised the \$5.00 and they rejoiced in the fact that God had called them, and that HE would look after them and would also bring them to Africa.

In those early years there was no Canadian Conference or churches to send and support missionaries in foreign countries.

In the winter of 1931, Daniel Wittenberg and I attended evening Bible Classes taught by Rev. A. B. Peters and also a personal work course taught by C.N. Hiebert. In one of our classes, Rev. Peters told us that as the older ministers would soon be gone, we as younger men would have to continue the Lord's work. He told us that someday we would stand before an audience and preach to men and women that are well educated. I'm sure that the reason he said this was to impress on us the importance of studying the Word of God. When I heard him say that with such emphasis I was shocked, and I thought to myself that I would

never be in a position to speak before educated people. But he was right, it has happened numerous times in my later years.

Rev. Peters was a humble man of God. I was told by someone who knew him well that he would read his Bible on his knees for hours at a time. He was small of stature, but was filled with God's love and the Holy Spirit. When he preached he stood on his toes behind the pulpit and lifted the Lord Jesus high. I shall refer to him later on in my writing, so please read on, the best is yet to come.

SELLING CHRISTIAN LITERATURE

I had learned to know Rev. Frank Isaak who lived in Winnipeg with his family, but who came to Kildonan occasionally to preach on Sunday mornings. His daughter Nalja worked as a secretary for the Bible Society in Winnipeg.

Since I had a lot of spare time during the winter, I asked Rev. Isaak if there would be an opportunity for me to get credit with the Bible Society so that I could sell Bibles, wall plaques and Christian literature from house to house. He encouraged me to do this and made an appointment for me to have an interview with Dr. Salter, the head of the Bible Society.

When I got to the Bible Society office, Dr. Salter greeted me at the door, and asked me to follow him into the board room, where Rev. Isaak was already seated. The board room had a long table which was surrounded with comfortable upholstered chairs. This was rather frightening for me, but here I was to meet these two great men. Dr. Salter asked me about my background and my faith. With the recommendation from Rev. Isaak that I was an honest man and could be trusted, Dr. Salter granted my request for credit. I thanked him for this trust. Then he introduced me to his secretary Miss Nalja Issak and told her to give me the literature that I needed. She suggested what would sell the best and so I filled my satchel with materials, signed a note for the amount of material taken, thanked her and left for home.

This was my winter spare time project. I knocked on doors of homes where I thought people wouldn't go

to church. This was my way of bringing them the gospel. Some people would let me in and would let me present the Testaments, plaques and Bibles. If possible they would buy an item or two. Others however would open the door and then shut it before my eyes. That didn't stop me. I would just go to the next house. Selling this Christian literature gave me an incentive to visit the English speaking neighbourhood, and was also an incentive for me to improve my English.

Numerous times I went back to the Bible Society and brought them the money for the literature I had sold. They allowed me to keep 35% as a commission. Then I again filled my satchel and went out to sell. Thus the Lord supplied all my needs for that winter.

However, I remember that one day I didn't have enough in my house to make a meal for supper. So I went to see how my friend Daniel was managing. I found that he and his family were in the same predicament as I was with not enough food for supper. Of course they had no money either. So we decided that I would bring whatever I had left and together with what they had, his wife Helen made "rollkuchen" and tea and we had a great feast together. After that we had Bible study and prayer until midnight. When I got home, the water in the pail standing next to the cold stove was frozen.

During that same winter I also tried to make a living by fixing shoes. But not many people could afford to have their shoes fixed, since money was so hard to come by.

I even put an advertisement in the "Mennonitsche Rundschau" (a monthly paper), letting the readers know that I would make made-to-measure leather or felt slippers.

One day I had an unexpected visitor. It was Mr. C.F. Klassen. His assignment was to collect the "Reiseschuld" (travel debt) for the CPR from all the immigrants. When he sat down and looked around at all the different slipper patterns hanging on the wall, he asked, "Is this the slipper factory you advertised in the paper?" I said, "Yes, but the business is very poor. People just don't have the money. I barely have enough to eat. I walk four miles to Eatons and back to buy day old bread for four cents a loaf.

Things are tough, but we hope for better days and years to come." Brother Klassen didn't have the nerve to ask for any money after that conversation.

Often men would come to me for a hair cut. I never charged for one. I remember though that one time when Jack Wittenberg came for a hair cut he paid me ten cents. With that money I bought a tin of marmalade, but when I brought it home, and tasted it, I couldn't eat it. It didn't taste good to me. So when Jack came back for a haircut the next time, I gave the marmalade to him because he liked the taste of it.

A FAMILY IN NEED FINDS SHELTER WITH ME

It was the end of March 1931 when one morning there was a knock at my door. When I opened it, there stood Mr. and Mrs. Peter Boldt. I had learned to know them when I was still living on the farm. We had met in church on Sundays. They also farmed at La Salle, Manitoba their first years in Canada.

The Boldts had also left the farm and had moved to Winnipeg to find work. Peter had found a job painting houses in the fall, but now their money was gone and they couldn't pay the rent anymore, so here they were, asking me whether they could move in with me. I was so surprised I didn't know what to say. Did they really mean it? But when they told me their story, I felt sorry for them, because they also had three children and the fourth was on his way. I said, "How can we make this possible? This shack is only 14 x 16. The inside is not finished. There are no partitions, but it is only one room." Mrs. Boldt replied, "Abram, if you only say, 'Yes, we can manage', we'll move your bed to the northwest corner close to the stove, ours to the northeast corner and the three children can sleep on the floor. We can draw a curtain between us for the night and I will do the cooking, washing and cleaning. Then if you two (Peter and I) could earn some money, that would give us the groceries." When I listened to what she was saying, I was amazed at the gifts God has given to woman. Wisdom, courage, willpower, love and contentment. That was all I needed to hear!



The Peter Boldt family that moved in with me.

Well, I couldn't have done anything better for the Boldt's or for myself. The next day they moved in. There were no roads around the house, but just trails through the bush. Outside there was still snow on the ground. We had to get the water from a pump two blocks away. But this family life made us all very happy. We deeply loved each other and shared in everything. The children would sit on my lap and I would sing with them. In the spring and summer we found odd jobs for eight or nine cents an hour weeding gardens or cutting lawns.

One job I had was looking after the lawn and flowers for Mr. Bardell who was an undertaker. He lived by the river. I noticed that his house needed painting so I asked him if I could bring a painter to him to give him a price. He said yes and so after supper, Peter Boldt and I went to see him and Mr. Bardell and Peter made a deal. The house was very large. It had a full basement, two full floors plus a high attic. The roof had cedar shingles and it was at a 45 degree pitch. Mr. Bardell offered to supply the paint and he offered to pay \$150.00 for the painting. Peter had promised me a job if he would get the painting job. We were overjoyed at this opportunity and thanked God for it. I had never held a brush in my hand before, but was willing to learn. The roof

was also in bad shape and needed fixing.

We started work the next morning at eight o'clock when the shingles and paint were delivered. We set up a ladder which was about 34 feet long and I climbed the ladder, carrying shingles, hammer and nails. When I reached the top of the roof, I felt uneasy and began slipping. The distance from the eavestrough to the cement sidewalk was about 30 feet and I was sliding and slipping. I thought that this was the end for me. I tried to support myself and hold onto the old shingles. While I was sliding downward, I steered myself toward the chimney. When I got there I sat and rested against the chimney. I felt as if my heart was in my throat. I was shaking and very frightened. I shouted at Peter and told him that the roof was too wet from the morning dew and that we would have to wait until it was dry. I also needed different shoes that would not slip. I asked him to help me down, because my life was in danger. It sure felt good to put my feet on solid ground again! To me it was a miracle that I had stayed alive.

After the roof was dry I used rubber soled shoes and replaced the shingles. Much old paint had to be scraped off the wall siding to get the walls ready for painting. My friend Peter was very good in showing me how to hold the brush and how to make the right strokes, so that the paint would flow from the brush onto the siding. It took several weeks to paint the house. To us this job was a great help.

Two weeks after the incident of slipping down the roof I went to see my mother on the farm. As we visited, she asked me how I was getting along. I told her about my experience on the rooftop. She asked, "When did this happen?" I told her the day and the hour, and she said, "That is why I had to go and pray for you that morning! My heart was restless within me and the Spirit of God told me to pray for Abram." Together we thanked God for answered prayer. This experience has helped me much in my prayer life, especially in my early Christian life when I lived in my little house. In the evenings I would go into the bush, kneel at a spot and pour out my heart to God. There I would find comfort and strength to carry on in my Christian walk.



My brother Jakob and his wife Anna came to visit me, 1931.



Three brothers, Abe, Jakob and Dietrich, 1931.

Since there was no steady work available in Winnipeg, I went back to the farm to help my brother with all the harvesting. Then I went back to Kildonan. In the meantime Peter Boldt had found odd jobs, and by late fall had saved \$150.00. With that money he made a down payment on a large lot close to Henderson Highway, which was two blocks away from where I lived. He also made a down payment on lumber for a 20 x 24 house with a slant roof. His friends and relatives helped him build the house and I built my first chimney for him. In my little house I only had stove pipes and no brick chimney. When their little house was finished, the Boldts were ready and anxious to move into larger quarters. I shall never

forget the last supper we shared. During supper there was a lot of talk and excitement. After the dishes were cleaned up and their belongings packed, we said goodbye with hugs and kisses and tears. We really had learned to know and love each other. I had not charged them any rent all summer. I also helped them move and when I got home again, my house seemed too big for me. I had gotten used to my little corner, in my own house.



Left to right: Abram, Peter, Jakob, Dietrech
Front: Peter's wife Anna, Mother, Jakob's wife Anna.

BUSHED FOR ONE MONTH

The winter of 1932 was cold and there was no work available. Daniel Wittenberg, his cousin Henry Wittenberg who was still single, Fred Begar and Karl Daher who were married, and I decided to go as far north by train as we could. Daher and Begar had contacted a man who had promised to pay one dollar per cord for firewood, but we had to supply all our own cooking utensils, bedding, blankets and pillows. We had a meeting and decided what each person was to take along. So on February 14, 1932 we were ready to leave.

Each of us was decorated in his own way. I had all the cooking utensils tied together and hanging around my shoulders; a pack sack of bedding on my back and an axe and a swedish saw in my hands. The

sight was hilarious, but we didn't mind because we were on our way to make money!

I had rented my house for a few months to an elderly couple, the J. Siemens, since they were renovating their house and needed a place to live. They moved in with five adults. How they managed I do not know, but they did.

When we arrived at the street car in North Kildonan with all our decorative belongings, the conductor and the passengers looked at us with huge eyes! We were so loaded with belongings that we could not sit down, but had to stand all the way to the CPR station. We left Winnipeg early in the morning and arrived at the end of the tracks before sundown. The man that we were to work for was waiting for us with his sleigh and team to take us to our destination in the bush. By the time we had made all the arrangements with him, the moon and the stars were shining. As he drove us through the bush it seemed there was no end to the ride. We were all cold from riding in an open sleigh for fourteen miles on a winding road. When we finally arrived at the log cabin, he unlocked the door for us. There we saw a few sacks of frozen potatoes, a sack of flour, some lard and a half a beef which was on the top of the roof outside so that the wolves couldn't reach it. He told us to only cut tamarack trees. He said to cut them into four foot lengths and pile them up into a 4 x 4 x 8 foot stack which measured one cord. Then he left for home.

Daher and Begar had previous bush experience, but we three Mennonites had none. Our hearts nearly failed us when we were alone and looked around and saw what we were in for. The wind blew through the cabin. We always had fresh air! The roof was constructed of tree rafters, an odd board, and several layers of black tar paper which were held down with tree trunks. Inside was an old rusted cast iron cook stove which hadn't baked bread for years and was never to bake in the future. By that time in the night we were all cold and hungry. None of us had brought any food from home. If we would not have been Christians, we would have cursed the place and turned back for home. Instead, I said, "Since this stove won't bake I'll make a dough and fry biscuits (schnetki)." I could

not find all the ingredients necessary, but did the best I could. So by midnight I had fried the biscuits and made tea. We all thanked God for bringing us to this place safely. We all had enough to eat that night. Then we fired the stove and got ready for bed. The frame of the beds were made of rough tree trunks and the mattress was also round tree trunks covered with a layer of hay. The situation was worse than being in jail, but inspite of it, we praised the Lord. After breakfast the next morning we headed for the bush with our axes and saws. The snow was knee deep. The tamrack trees were scattered far apart. That meant that at time we had to carry the four foot lengths great distances. I said to myself, "I am not going to kill myself working in these conditions. If I cut one cord a day I will be happy and then I'll go in and cook the meals." Daher and Begar and my friend Daniel had a wife and children at home and so they needed to work harder. In the evenings we talked, discussed the Bible, sang and had prayer together. At night Henry Wittenberg fired the wood heater so we wouldn't freeze to death.

Most days I cut my cord. Sometimes I even cut one and a quarter, but Daher and Begar had bush experience from Poland and they cut from one and a half to one and three quarter cord a day, but they nearly worked themselves to death.

After we had been working like this for about two weeks our boss came to see us and brought Begar a letter from his wife. Begar was instructed to go home because his wife was sick and needed an operation and the children were also sick. So he and my friend Daniel (who decided to go along with him) took the train home.

Daher, Henry Wittenberg and I stayed for another two weeks. By this time we were fed up with our adventure and with this place of work. Daher was also concerned about how his family would be managing at home. We all decided to leave. The last day we only worked until noon. Then we made a sleigh, had supper, tied all our belongings onto the sleigh and left for home. Again it was a fourteen mile trip by stars and moonlight through the winding bush trail to the station. We arrived at the station very early in the morning. Everything was quiet and no one was in

sight. the train station was still locked. We waited until the station master came to unlock the door. Then we asked him how to find our boss. He told us to go to the grocery store and see the manager there. The manager allowed us to phone our boss who then came to the store and was surprised to see us there. We told him how many cord we had cut and piled and that we could not do the work any longer. We asked him for our pay check, but he said he had no money to pay us. He would first have to sell the cord wood that we had cut. But we insisted that we were finished and wanted to go home. Finally he arranged for credit with the shopkeeper and we were told to take various goods instead of money. He gave us only enough money to pay for the way home by train and streetcar. For the rest of the money due to us we took overalls, mittens and minor things. I was glad that I had not overworked myself for such a businessman!

Going home we had even more to carry around ourselves than we had when we left Winnipeg. We felt dirty. None of us had shaved in four weeks nor had we been able to have a good cleanup. Riding home in the train we could sit again, but in the streetcar in Winnipeg we had to stand up again. I was more embarrassed about all the things that dangled around me on the way home than I had been when I had left a month earlier.

I knew that I could not get into my house since I had rented it out, so I decided to knock at Peter Boldt's door. There I stood with all my tools and cooking utensils hanging around me like jingle bells. When Mrs. Boldt opened the door and saw me standing there, she welcomed me into their home with open arms. Here I cleaned up and she gave me a nice warm meal. To me it was like coming home. They offered that I could sleep in their living room and that I could even fix shoes and cut men's hair in the living room. I felt as if I was with my own family again. They showed me much love and appreciation for what I had done for them the previous year.

In the spring when the Siemen's moved out of my house, I moved back into it. The month of May had come and some of us had still not found any work. One day Fred Begar came to me and said that Mr. C. Hiebert wanted three men to cut cord wood. He said Jakob

Wiens wanted to join him and asked if I would like to join them. We all knew that we could trust Mr. Hiebert to pay us in cash. This time the work was about 75 miles north of Winnipeg. There would be heavy bush and we were told to expect bear, wolves and deer. I still had all my bush equipment and so we hired a truck to take us down with all our belongings. This time there was no log cabin. We had to build our own.

Mr. Hiebert gave us a large canvas and a screen window. I borrowed a gun with ammunition. We also took a few spades along. When we arrived, we were told where to cut and pile the cord wood. After we had unloaded our bedding and equipment, the truck driver left for home. It was just the time when the mosquito season was starting.

We quickly dug a hole that was approximately three feet deep and 10 x 10. Then we cut trees and had our log house built before evening. We made supper and got ready for bed. After evening devotions, I loaded my gun and put it beside me in bed, ready to shoot if a bear or wolf should come. During the day I always had the gun loaded and I carried it with me wherever I was working. Fred Begar suggested that we should have Bible studies in the evenings or that we should preach to each other.

After one week of cutting and piling wood, Jakob Wiens said that he had had enough and so the next day he hitchiked home. I think he was lonesome for his girlfriend. Fred and I stayed for one more week.

One night Fred suddenly got very sick. I am sure it must have been an appendicitis attack. He was doubled over with great pain in the lower righthand part of his body. We prayed together and I suggested that we head for home the next day, because if things got worse, I could not carry him out of the bush on my shoulders since he was taller than I was.

A week later we went back to pick up our mattresses, utensils and tools and noticed that a big bear had come to visit our camp. Since the man with the gun had left, he had climbed to the peak of the tent, torn a hole and jumped in, ate the honey, some potatoes and bread that was left and then he made his way out through the screen window. So here we had missed the excitement, but we made it safely home.

There would be no more bush and cord cutting experiences for me after this.

MY BROTHER JAKOB

In the summer of 1932 I added a 10 x 14 porch to my house which I used partially as a kitchen and the rest for living quarters.

In July I went back to the farm to help my brother Jakob. By now he had a son Jacob and his wife Anna was expecting their second child. During the haying season Jakob caught a bad cold which developed into tuberculosis. That meant that I would have to look after all the harvesting with my brothers John and Peter. This was Jakob's last year on the farm since his three year lease was up.

When all the harvest was in, I took Jakob's family, my mother and my brother Dietrich to my little house in Kildonan.

Jakob developed pluresy and had to go to the hospital each week to have the fluid drained from his lungs. The doctor suggested that Jakob be taken to the Ninete T.B. Hospital. Now suddenly I had a family to look after: a sick mother, a sister-in-law with two little children and my brother Dietrich. Dietrich soon got work in a grocery store with his friend Victor Willms and I struggled my way through with the others. But I must say, God saw our need and he supplied our needs. Anna was a good, careful housekeeper. She made very tasty meals from a limited supply of groceries. There was good harmony in our house. I helped Anna with the children and they loved my like their daddy, even when I had to discipline them at times.

Jakob was very lonely in the hospital. He had very few visitors. Only his in-laws, the Ratzlaff's and some friends who lived in that vicinity visited him. As a family we visited him only once in the summer of 1934.

While he was in the sanitorium, Jakob wrote poetry dealing with his longing for a better world and he also translated hymns from the English into the German. The following is a poem he wrote in German, which has been translated into English.

I am lonesome, so alone
Away from those I love - and home,
In these my times of trouble;
Spend sleepless nights,
Am tossed and torn,
And then the devil tempts me.

My heart gets weighted down with grief
When to my sorrow and disbelief
More suffering falls upon me;
It is a though
An arrow slow
Were buried deep inside me.

Yet I'm convinced that it is God
Who now permits this suffering sad,
And does it to prepare me,
In this dread day,
Through pathways grey,
For heavens eternity.

I came to know Him through my grief
And thank Him for the firm belief:
His Providence doth guide me,
And so I shall,
Till death will call,
Cling to His grace completely.

All his letters spoke of loneliness, yet great trust in God.

As the summer passed, and autumn came, mother lost strength and needed much care and attention.

OUR DEAR MOTHER IS DYING

To us children, mother was the number one attraction. She had looked after us and our well being in the old country. We tried our best to look after her in the new country. I felt badly that mother always had to move into smaller living quarters, with less privacy and less comfortable facilities, but she was never a complainer or a problem. She never blamed us for being so poor and for not making headway in Canada. The depression years were hard for everyone and steady work was not

available. So we lived from hand to mouth, so to speak, and tried to make the best of the situation. Many times I stood beside mother, put my arms around her and kissed her and said, "Mother, you are so beautiful. I am sorry I can't give you a better place to live, or provide more comfort for you, because you deserve it." Then she would say, "Abram, I understand. Let's be thankful for what we still have!"

Many times before going to bed she would ask me to massage her back, neck and shoulders. To me it was a privilege and I did it gladly. In the fall of 1933 her health was failing very rapidly. The doctor said she had T.B. in her spine and consequently walking became a problem.

Walking to church, which was only across the backlane was difficult and I would support, and almost carry her. Finally she was confined to bed and had to be looked after completely.

In December 1933, Anna and her children wanted to visit Jakob in the hospital and wanted to stay with her parents, the Peter Ratzlaff's in Dunrea for the Christmas season. We were all happy that she could go. So I took it upon myself to look after mother. I found the house empty after Anna and the children were gone.

On December 23 Dietrich was also not at home and so mother and I were alone. That day she hardly ate a thing. Occasionally she drank some water. That evening I took a chair, placed it beside her bed, sat down and watched her. When I noticed that she could not speak anymore because her tongue was so swollen and dry, I took a glass of water and a goose feather and wet her lips and tongue. I noticed that she appreciated this. At seven o'clock, as I was watching, I noticed that she was dying. All at once she began to shiver and shake so much that the whole bed rattled. I wondered, "Why this, Lord?" Could it be that Satan wanted to attack her in the hour of death? I asked, "Mother, shall I pray for you?" She could not speak, but nodded, "Yes". So I knelt beside her bed, closed my eyes and prayed: "God, you have given me this godly mother and I thank you for what she has meant to me in my lifetime. She has been a Christian example in our family. I thank you for the

unselfish love she has given us as a family and for all the prayers she has offered for us her children and especially on my behalf. Please, Lord, give her peace and rest in this dying hour. Take her unto yourself, guide her through the valley of death and bless her with the crown of righteousness in Glory, for Jesus sake, Amen!"

When I opened my eyes she was quiet and resting and her breathing was slow. I sat and watched her. Her eyes were closed; all at once she said, "Jakob!" "Oh," I thought to myself, "could it be that she saw father coming to meet her?" After a few more breaths, she said, "Sara" and that was her oldest daughter who had died in Russia in 1920. Now I knew she saw her family and recognized them. Then she breathed two more times, very slowly, and with a gentle smile on her face, passed into Glory at 8:20 p.m. We phoned Anna and she came home with the children for the funeral. I have always been thankful to God that I had the privilege of being with mother in her dying hour, to witness her going. I know she is with the Lord Jesus who redeemed her, and that she waits for us to come and join her and all the saints in the presence of the Lord.

I made her coffin and with the help of my brother John, placed her in it and she was buried in La Salle, Manitoba on January 1, 1934 at the age of 61 years and eight months. Exactly twelve years later than our father.

The following is an obituary poem for our dear mother:

MOTHER DEAR

Come and whisper soft and low,
Mother dear,

As you used to long ago:
"Mother here!"

It will soothe my troubled breast,
It will lull me into rest,
For of all I love you best,
Mother dear.

Oh, how long it seems tonight,
Mother dear,
Since I saw your face so bright,
Hover near.

But I know I love you more,
While the years are passing o'er
Than I ever have before,
Mother dear.

How I fancy o'er and o'er,
Mother dear,
All the happy days of yore
With you near;
How you murmured soft and low'
As you kissed my cheek aglow:
"Precious child, I love you so!"
Mother dear.

So my grateful heart shall beat,
Mother dear,
With a love, though incomplete,
Ever here;
And, though far away tonight,
Yet our spirits in their flight,
Mother dear.

Yes, precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. (Psalm 116:15)

I have returned to her graveside a number of times, and in silence I stood, meditated and gave thanks to God for my praying mother.

In these past years my brothers John and Peter each had their own families and so they decided to go their own ways. Peter rented a farm at Oak Bluff which he later bought. In 1934 John needed help, so I went to help him. We always got along well together.

I was often amazed at him working long days all week and yet on Sundays he would still preach such Spirit-filled messages. I often thought he was a giant in the scriptures and wished that I would have his gift in preaching. But God was patient with me, and didn't give up on me. I should have gone to Bible school like many other young men did, but life was difficult for me and I didn't want to study on credit like some others did. So God led me through school in a round about way.

In October 1934 when the harvesting was finished, my brother Jakob discharged himself from the hospital and came home from the sanitorium to join his family

in Kildonan. He could not work because of his weakness and so I took it upon myself to look after his family and myself with the wages I earned plus extra money I had been able to earn. Jakob enjoyed his family to the fullest until the end of March, and we enjoyed him. During this time we tried to catch up on the news and fellowship we had missed in the 18 months he had spent in the hospital.

JAKOB'S DEATH

One Sunday an announcement was made that a visiting minister would be at the midweek service in the church and we were asked to sing. The speaker was going to preach on the second coming of the Lord. So Isaak Klassen sang tenor, Daniel Wittenberg sang second tenor, Jakob sang alto and I sang bass. We practised a song about the coming of the Lord that Jakob had translated from English into German while in the sanitorium. We believed that the evening was a success. The message was good and the songs suited the message.

On our way home, a strong wind developed and shifted so that Jakob caught a severe cold that caused a relapse. We called on Rev. Jakob Reimer and Rev. Abram Peters to anoint and pray over him, but two weeks later, on April 8, 1935 he died at the young age of twenty six years.

The evening before he died the doctor came out to see him, but there was nothing he could do. The illness had taken its course. The last few hours were beyond description. He tried to breathe, but his lungs would not function any more, and so he died. It still grips me when I think of it. We loaded him onto a light delivery truck and took him to John's farm and placed his body into a grainery. I made his coffin out of 2 x 12 planks, painted it black, fixed it up and placed him in it so that his body was ready for the funeral. The funeral took place on April 12, 1935 at the La Salle M.B. Church.

After the funeral we turned back to Kildonan, heavy hearted, to continue our life, but there was an emptiness which could not be filled.



Myself with Jakob and Annas children, Jakob and Mary.

BACK TO THE FARM

Deep down in my heart there was a turmoil, an aloneness which took the joy out of my life. My dear mother and my closest brother had gone to be with the Lord. I knew I had done my very best for them until the very end. My correspondence with Brazil continued on a monthly basis, but yet the future was dark. I'll never forget the hard times in the thirties.

Finally Anna (Jakob's wife) and children went on welfare and in December 1935 I was asked to come and help out at the Cornelius Janzen's farm in Fortier, Manitoba. The Janzens were people I had never met before. Our friend John Wedel and his young wife Olga had been hired to do the barn work for the winter so their son Peter Janzen could attend the Winkler Bible School. John Wedel took ill suddenly and had to go back to Kildonan to have an operation. He asked me to take his place at the farm.

Since there wasn't much work during the winter, I packed my suitcase and left by train. When I arrived at the station in Fortier, David Janzen, the oldest son of Cornelius Janzen was there to pick me up. When we got to the farm it was already dark, the chores had been done and supper was finished, but their daughter Lydia had a nice supper waiting for me. As I was

eating my supper, Mr. C. Janzen wanted to know about my background and asked me many questions. After talking for awhile we found out that his brother Isaak Janzen had been the first husband of my aunt (my mother's sister Sarah. After Isaak Janzen's death aunt Sarah married Mr. David Penner who was a widower with six children.)

After our talk I felt that I was accepted as a reliable hired help and was to be paid \$10.00 per month. I worked from six in the morning until six in the evening every day except Sunday. It didn't take long until I had company during my day's work. David Janzens lived just across the road and their five year old son Helmut came over and before long we were really good friends. His older brothers all attended school, and so he followed me around from morning until evening. At times the family had a hard time getting him home for bedtime. He loved singing and so did I. He taught me many courses, and I taught him some. At that time he was a cute little fellow, and now he is the Assistant Pastor in our Bakerview M.B. Church. He still calls me Uncle Abe. I believe it was God's leading that I met this Helmut because later on during my sunday school mission work, I often used the courses he had taught me to sing with the children. These songs blessed many little hearts.

When my three month term was over, Peter Janzen came home from Bible School and I was free to go home. Mr. Janzen paid me \$12.00 per month instead of \$10.00, because, he said, I had done my work well!

By now I felt that if I wanted to do any work for the Lord, I had to learn English. So I went to work on the farm for an Englishman, Eldon Clark, who was an atheist. His wife was a Christian. They had three sons but he could not get along with any of them and so they had all left home. The sons never came home to see their parents during the seven months I worked there.

I liked working for the Clarks. We never went to work the land before 8 o'clock in the morning. We were always home at 12 noon and left again after the horses had their fill at about one thirty or two. We never worked after 6 p.m. After supper Mr. Clark usually loved to sit and talk for at least a half hour. This was very helpful for me to improve my

English. Many times we had discussions about God and the Bible, but he believed in the science of nature. He had a big book written by H. G. Wells and that, he said, was his Bible.

I can recall one day, after a heated debate, I told him that if he was right that there is nothing after death we both had nothing to lose. But if the Bible which tells about heaven and hell after death was true, then I had everything to gain that heaven had to offer and he, as an unbeliever, would have to bear the consequences in hell. As far as I know, he died in unbelief. "Poor Mr. Clark."

MY MOST DIFFICULT DECISION

While I worked on this farm I had great struggles about my future. I wanted to serve the Lord in some way, but I felt I was bound to a certain extent. My heart's desire was that God should show me very clearly whether I should continue corresponding with Brazil and keep on hoping and waiting for an opportune time for Liese and I to meet and marry or whether I should break the relationship completely. I made it an object of sincere prayer. I pled with God on my knees, asking Him to show me what to do. This went on for several months.

One evening I felt that I should read the Bible with an open mind and accept whatever the Lord would reveal to me. Hesitantly, yet prayerfully, I opened the Bible, wondering what God would say to me. I opened the Bible to Isaiah 58 and read the whole chapter. I was only at verse 6 and I already knew what God wanted me to do. In the German it was more plain to me, but this is what I read: "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break the yoke?" Please read the whole chapter. It is tremendous. Especially verse 8 where "Light, health and protection is promised".

I realize that God had spoken these words to his people the Jews, but I felt in my heart that I had bound Liese all these years, because I did not want to break the promise which I had made to her before we parted. All the efforts I had made in trying to have

her come to Canada had failed. I saw that this was Gos'd will for me now, even if it hurt.

I knew without a shadow of a doubt that this was the answer from the Lord for me. But then came the question, "How can I write to her so that she won't be hurt and so she would also accept it as from the Lord?" A new struggle began within me. We had corresponded for nine years and always hoped that someday we would see each other and be together. Now it would be a break for good. Would she be able to take it? How would she react? But the words in verse six where it says, "to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burden, and to let the oppressed go free" convinced me that this was what I had to do, and do it in love.

The next evening I sat down and prayerfully wrote her my experiences. I reminded her how we met as young people in Gnadenheim, both of us not Christians. I thanked her for what she had meant in my life all these years. I told her about the struggle I had been through, and the prayers concerning clarification in the matter, and how God had spoken to me through Isaiah 58. I suggested that she should accept this as from the Lord, and if she felt led by the Lord to marry a Christian man, she was free to do so. I also wrote that I was free and had no one in mind and if by chance we should ever meet again, either by her coming to Canada or me going to Brazil, we should meet as friends and forget the past.

A month later I received a letter from Liese. She told me of her disappointment but that she would take it as from the Lord. I thanked God, and wrote in my last letter that I appreciated her agreement in this matter and wished her God's blessing in her future life.

FREE AT LAST

Up to this point I had no desire for another woman. I didn't let anyone pressure me either. After having lived in Canada for several years, I can recall meeting someone who had been our neighbour in Russia. He said, "Abram, forget about the past. In this country there is not only a handful of girls who want to get married, but a land full!" I believe he was

right, but I wanted the one that God had reserved for me. It had taken me nine years to ask the Lord for help in finding a life's partner.

Now I started praying: "God, if you have one for me, show her to me. I don't want to make a mistake." I also told the Lord that I was in no big hurry; and that I could wait. But I wanted His blessing on my life.

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

And so it happened that in 1936 I was back on the farm working for my brother John. The seeding was finished and we were fixing the machinery in preparation for harvest. During the month of July there were two young ladies who were conducting Summer Vacation Bible School in the La Salle M.B. Church. John's children also attended these classes. The understanding was that the parents of the children would take turns inviting these teachers for dinner.

On this particular July day my brother picked up his children from church and brought the two teachers home with him. Helen, my sister-in-law, was a very good cook. She had prepared a very tasty chicken dinner. As John drove into the yard, I was busy fixing the hay mowing machine close to the blacksmith shop. All the children left the vehicle and John came and introduced these two ladies to me. The first one was a Margarete Giesbrecht and the other was Katie Martens. I had never seen these ladies before, nor did I expect what took place in my heart when Katie Martens reached out to shake my hand. An inner voice told me, "This is the one you have been praying for!" I couldn't believe it at first, but repeatedly the voice said, "She is the one!"

Well, we all sat down for our chicken dinner. The two teachers sat across the table from me. I was very quiet, but John and the teachers talked about their work and about Bible School days, etc. After dinner I went back to work. John, Helen and the two teachers visited for another hour or so. But I was not the same anymore. I was thinking, "Should this really come to happen some day? Will God be so gracious to me inspite of all my failures?"

The DVBS closing program came, and I went along.

I took a closer look at Katie Martens. I liked the way she talked to the children. She also led in the singing. All her actions and behaviour impressed me very much. When I went home that evening, I found that I had lost my heart. From that time on, I started praying for her ever so often. But just read on, the best is yet to come!

In the meantime I had sold my little house in Kildonan and I now stayed with John on the farm to help him wherever I could. My youngest brother Dietrich had found employment at Klassen Brothers in Kildonan and had married Anna Warkentin from Margret, Manitoba on October 11, 1936. They both loved singing and were active in choir work.

In the winter of 1938 I persuaded John to make changes in his house so it would be more practical to live in and also easier to heat upstairs. The stairs were hidden behind a wall which led to the upstairs bedrooms. So I tore out that wall and stairs and put in a winding stairway. I also made an extra bedroom upstairs. I did this during the day.

That winter I also enrolled in a correspondence course from the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. It was "A Practical Christian Work Course" by the Rev. R. A. Torrey, D.D. The course was a series of eighteen lessons and consisted of eight volumes totalling 362 pages.

I studied these lessons in the evenings. I translated all the lesson material into German, wrote the exams and sent them back to Chicago. With a large English-German dictionary at my side, I enjoyed my studies very much. I also memorized scripture passages in English. In my early years in Canada I had copied the New Testament in English, which helped me alot now in studying this course. I could not finish the course that winter however. Spring came and we had to go and work in the fields. Again it was time to do the seeding.

With so much work on the farm, time went very fast. After the harvest was in, I felt deep in my heart that I should go east to Toronto and look for a job there. I felt just like a bird of passage that flies south for the winter and comes back in spring again. I told John that he didn't need to pay me in full. He should keep some money back, and in case I

needed more, I would let him know. A few days before I boarded the train, I went to Kildonan to buy some clothes and to say goodbye to Anna and the children, as well as to Dietrich and Anne, family and friends.

When I got to my sister-in-law Anna (Jakob's widow), she greeted me with a smile and said, "Guess who wrote me a letter?" I said, "It must have been my friend Henry Suderman." She was so surprised! She said, "How do you know?" I said, "He wrote me a month or so ago and asked me what I would think if he should propose to you. I gave him all the information about you that he needed, but I told him that he had to make his own decision." I said, Anna, I am so glad, I am sure you'll get a very good husband. He will treat you well and will also look after your two children, Jacob and Mary." I wished them God's blessing. In November 1938, Henry Suderman came to Kildonan, picked up the family and he and Anna were married in Dunrea, Manitoba on the farm that Henry shared with his brother John and family.

Now I was the only single person left in our family and was worry free. Everyone in our family was settled except for myself, and with God's presence and His blessing I was willing to obey and meet the future.

A NEW VENTURE

The day before I left for Toronto, I met Rev. Abram Peters (my former Bible teacher) in the Ukranian Book Store. He came up to me and said, "How are you, brother Friesen? What are you doing?" When I told him about my plans to go to Toronto, he asked me if I had any friends or relatives there. I said, "No, I don't know anyone, but I feel in my heart that I should go east." He then told me that he had a nephew living in Toronto and that I should go and see him and give him his greetings. He gave me his nephew's address, wished me God's speed and we parted.

From there I went to a grocery store where I bought some apples and six grapefruit (which I had never tasted before, but since they looked so good and big, I thought they would be delicious.) Next evening I boarded the train and off I went, wondering what would transpire in the future.

The train rolled on in utter darkness, blowing its whistle with much steam. It all sounded good to me. I sat and read the book that I had purchased in the bookstore when I had met Rev. Peters. Soon it was midnight. Some passengers were fast asleep. Others were dozing, but I had no sleep whatsoever. Then I thought, "This is my chance to try the grapefruit and to have a good feast since no one can see me!"

I opened the bag, picked out what I thought was the best grapefruit and took a really good bite. What a disappointment! My tongue shrivelled together! My facial features changed completely! I wish I could have seen my face in a mirror. I thought, "That fruit is not worth a dime!". I grabbed the bag, put my grapefruit back into it, opened the window and threw them all out. I said, "Never again will I be tempted to buy this kind of fruit! Forget it!" Then I took an apple. At least I knew what I was eating!

I had no sleep all night. The clicking of the wheels on the track kept me wide awake. When morning finally came, I enjoyed the scenery and all the little towns, stations, red earth and red rocks, Lake Superior, the winding tracks, the whistle blowing ever so often, and the puffing of the engine. All too soon another evening came, with a long darkness ahead. I wondered, "How will my arrival be in Toronto? What will I do next? Where will I stay through the day? Should I perhaps go first to Rev. Peters' nephew and give him greetings?" Well, by the time the train stopped in Toronto, I had made up my mind that I would go to the Peters' address first. At least I would have that off my mind.

The second night again I had not been able to sleep a wink. That made two nights and one day without sleep.

When I got out of the train station I noticed a taxi waiting for passengers so I gave him the Peters' address and he took me there in about twenty minutes. I paid my fare, took my suitcase, thanked him and walked up to the front door. By now my little heart was beating faster. What could I expect at 7:15 in the morning?

I knocked at the door. A friendly young lady opened it, wondering about this stranger standing there. I introduced myself and asked her if they had

an Uncle Abram Peters in Winnipeg. She said yes. I told her that I had met him in Winnipeg a few days earlier and that he had given me their address and that he had also asked me to deliver his greetings. By this time she was even more friendly and asked me to come in and meet her husband. He had just finished his breakfast and had to leave for work in a few minutes.

Mrs. Peters then asked me to join them for breakfast. After ten or fifteen minutes Mr. Peters left for work and we sat and talked. She made me feel at ease. Soon her two children came downstairs for their breakfast and since I am a friend of children, it didn't take long before I had them sitting on my lap and I was singing with them.

I took the morning paper and looked for a job but couldn't find what I was looking for. After lunch I walked up town and bought the Toronto Star. In it I found an ad saying: "Shoemaker wanted at Sunnyside Beach". I went back to the Peters and phoned the number in the ad. The man at the other end of the line told me to come in for an interview. Mrs. Peters invited me to stay with them for the night. Her hospitality reminded me of Romans 12:13 where it reads, "Distributing to the necessity of the saints, given to hospitality." I felt that she did it as unto the Lord. "God bless you, sister!"

I took the streetcar to the address I had been given and when I arrived, I found two men in one business location. The older man had his hat cleaning business in the front and also a large shoe shine parlor, with glass mirrors on both sides. There were raised chairs on each side of the room and there was room for eight or ten customers on each side so a total of twenty people could be served at once.

In the back a younger man (about 28) had his shoe repair business. When we talked, he told me that he wanted to go back to Albania, his native country, to find a wife. He said he would be gone for four months. When he asked me about my experience, I told him that I had learned the shoe making trade in Russia and had had my own business in Russia for a year. I said that I had some experience in shoe repair in Canada. We agreed on what he would pay and on the hours I would have to work. He told me I would have

to work until nine on Fridays and Saturdays. I was to fix shoes and also learn to shine shoes. I could start as soon as I was ready.

When I brought this news back to the Peters they said that I was very lucky to have a trade and to get a job so quickly in a strange city. They told me that 10,000 university students were walking the streets of Toronto and could not find jobs.

After supper the Peters asked me if I would stay at home and babysit their children so they could go out for the evening. Their children were to go to bed at 8:30. Mrs. Peters then showed me a bedroom where I could sleep. I felt certain that the Lord was with me, and in my heart I rejoiced and thanked Him.

I had alot of fun with the children who were still under school age. When bedtime came, I was also dead tired since I had not slept since I left Winnipeg. After my evening devotions I got into the nice clean bed and was asleep in a moment. I slept without moving for the entire night. When I got up the next morning my sheets didn't even have a wrinkle.

After breakfast I went into town and looked for a place to rent. I found a rooming house about two blocks from my place of work. An elderly lady owned the house and I rented a bedroom where I could even do my own cooking on a hot plate. The rent was \$1.25 a week. I don't know how many rooms she had, but I was the only man in this house. I moved in that same day and was ready to tackle my new job. I wanted to pay the Peter's for their wonderful hospitality, but they wouldn't allow me to. They were just happy that they had been able to help me. Oh how I thanked God for his leading! I learned that God will reveal His will to us if we want to be led. It is a matter of being in touch with the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a matter of drawing close to Him. It is a willingness to do His will when He shows it to us. Knowing the will of God comes through a day-by-day walk with Him and a willingness to be led by Him. This will keep us on the right road through life and it will be a great joy to our hearts.

I had a joyous winter. I was given the key to the shop and was allowed to make my own breakfast there. I usually got to work at seven in the morning, cooked my porridge, made my toast and had my morning

devotions. By eight o'clock I was ready to work. The older gentleman (hat cleaner) was also from Albania and had come to Canada by himself twelve years earlier. Now in 1938 he had his family come to live with him. He had a 17 year old son who helped me in the shoe repair and when he was not too busy, he would shine shoes. At first I found the shoe shining rather tricky. I had to practise on the boss's shoes and also on his sons' shoes. They did mine. Soon I was ready to shine customers' shoes.

My first customer was a lady. She was wearing suede shoes. I had to buff the suede first, then use some liquid and buff them again. When I was finished she paid me for the shine, plus she gave me a ten cent tip! That was a good beginning!

These Albanians were Greek Orthodox and were not regular church goers. The young boy and I became good friends and many times he came to church with me on Sunday nights.

Before I had left Winnipeg I had seen a change of address for George D. Huebert from Gem, Alberta to Toronto. I am sure this was also the leading of the Lord. I cut out the address and put it into my wallet and took it with me. After I had been in Toronto for two weeks, felt established and was more familiar with downtown Toronto, on a Sunday evening I decided to visit them.

They were also total strangers to me. When I found their street and house number, I walked up the steps and wondered whether I should knock or leave it for some other time. I took courage and knocked. Mrs. Huebert opened the door and looked at me. I again introduced myself and told her where I had found their address. By then Mr. Huebert was at the door and they both asked me to come in. It did not take long to get acquainted and we became very close friends. Rev. G. Huebert had taught Bible School at Gem, Alberta for a few years and was now studying in Toronto at the Baptist Biblical Seminary. They attended the Baptist church where Dr. Shields was the pastor. Since their Baptist church had burnt down, they held their service in the large Massey Hall which seated 4,000 people. So I also decided to attend this church. I had looked for a fundamental church in Toronto that would preach the real gospel.

The Hueberts and I became such good friends that they asked me for dinner nearly every Sunday. At the time they had two boys. Helmut was about three and Walter was about one. One Sunday, as we all sat at the table ready to eat, Mr. Huebert asked his son Helmut to say grace. He did, but following the "Amen," in the same breath, he said, "I don't want those peas!" He made a real fuss about the peas. But Mr. & Mrs. Huebert told him, "You just thanked the Lord for the food and now you have to eat the peas too!" With tears in his eyes he pleased his parents and ate the peas.

At times when the Hueberts wanted an evening off, they asked me to babysit their boys, which I did gladly. Now as I write these lines, Mr. G. D. Huebert has already been with the Lord for about four years. He died in May 1981. Helmut, the oldest son, is a doctor in Winnipeg. Walter has been a teacher in Penticton for many years. I really learned to love and appreciate these dear people. They meant alot to me. I took it as a leading from the Lord to first see their change of address and then to have the courage to knock at their door.

One day while I was at the Hueberts, Henry and Susie Peters came to visit. They had both been Rev. Hueberts students in Gem, Alberta and now they were taking a missionary medical course in the People's Church in Toronto. The Peters' planned to go to Africa as missionaries. Before long I knew three couples and this gave me great joy to fellowship with born again believers. This all helped me to believe that God had brought me here, but I didn't know for how long. So please read on, the best is yet to come!

My young boss left for Albania about one week after I started working for him. I had been introduced to all the different machines and tools he had for repairing shoes. Before he left he told me that there was a custom in Albania that if a girl wanted to marry a young man, her father had to pay a certain amount of money to the boys' father. But, he said, he would do it the Canadian way and would find his own wife and bring her back to Canada. He had no particular girl in mind when he left. We were all curious to see the new couple return to Canada.

In the mean time Henry and Susie Peters had

talked a lot to me about the People's Church they attended, where Dr. Oswald J. Smith was the pastor. One Sunday night I wanted to see for myself what it was like. I happened to visit them that Sunday afternoon, and after supper, we went to church. Never in my life had I seen such a large church, built completely with red bricks. It was a lovely building with two large double doors in the front. As we walked in it seemed to me that the church was filled to capacity. The audience was standing and Dr. Oswald Smith was leading in the opening prayer. We had to stand and wait in the foyer until he was finished. The impression that man of God made on me when he prayed I have never experienced before. The whole audience stood in awe and reverence before the Lord. It was like a high priestly prayer with a compassion for lost souls. After he had prayed, we were ushered all the way to the front. There was a hundred member choir singing, accompanied by piano and organ and by a symphony orchestra with more than fifty musicians. I could hardly stay seated as I listened to this sacred music.

Dr. Smith's message was so plain and clear that children and older people, educated and uneducated like myself could all understand. It was also a powerful evangelistic message that deeply stirred me within. No wonder that 3,500 to 4,000 people filled this church every Sunday morning and evening and also on Wednesday nights. Many times hundreds were turned away because there was not enough room. At times even the wide steps leading to the balcony were filled. I had never seen anything like it.

That first evening I made up my mind that this would be my place of worship on Sundays and Wednesdays. Dr. Smith preached either a prophetic message or a message on the deeper life of the Christian on Sundays. In the afternoon, his assistance, J. Edwin Orr from Belfast Ireland, conducted meetings for men who could not come in the mornings because of working graveyard shifts. Sunday nights, from seven to eight thirty the services had an evangelistic thrust. At 8:30 there was a 3/4 hour recess for choir and orchestra practise. Whoever wanted to go home could do so. Others could stay or go across the street for coffee and donuts and come

back for another 3/4 of an hour, for what was called the "Back Home Hour" radio broadcast. I usually went to all the services and went home filled and equipped for another week of working and testifying for the Lord. By the time I got to know Dr. Smith, he had already written over 500 hymns and poems. He had also written fourteen books and many tracts and articles. I attended two missionary conferences in his church. One in March 1939 and the other in March 1940. His church supported 200 missionaries in foreign fields. These mission stations were established by him while he toured the world. He raised \$75,000.00 in offerings for these missionaries. That was a lot of money in those years.

In 1950 Billy Graham wrote the Foreword in Oswald J. Smith's book "The Passion for Souls". He writes as follows:

The heart and core of Youth for Christ is the missionary burden and vision. Youth for Christ International now has rallies operating in over fifty-five countries of the world. Thousands of people on foreign soil are finding Christ through this gigantic organization. The missionary vision that transformed Youth for Christ several years ago was largely the product of the vision, counsel, advice, leadership and comradeship of Dr. Oswald J. Smith.

As a missionary statesman he has no peer. Around the world the name of Oswald J. Smith symbolizes world-wide evangelization. His preaching tours, the tremendous amounts of money raised, and his God given vision have been the dynamic encouragement and drive of countless missionary societies. When the missionary vision had dimmed a few years ago, a voice from Toronto kept crying in the wilderness: "Missions! Missions! Missions!" and evangelical Christians across the American continent began to awake once again to their responsibility to the heathen. His challenging addresses, now published in his book, have been used of God to help

raise over three million dollars for missions. As a missionary he exemplifies a passion for souls.

As an evangelist he has a burning passion for the souls of men. His intense drive, his powerful, clear and concise presentation of the Gospel, his God-given ability to give an invitation have proved on hundreds of platforms and at a hundred alters that he has been generously endowed with the gift of evangelism. As an evangelist he exemplifies a passion for souls.

As a pastor the great ministry of the People's Church proclaims to all the world that this man has learned the secret of a successful pastor - the heart and core of the great People's Church in Toronto is evangelism and missions. Few other pastors have had so long and fruitful a pastorate as that of Oswald J. Smith. I have spoken in the Peoples Church on several occasions and on every occasion I have been amazed to find it packed and jammed to capacity. Only heaven's records know how many souls have knelt at the Peoples Church alter and found Christ. As a pastor he exemplifies a passion for souls.

As an author his books and pamphlets have been translated into scores of languages. It is impossible for one to read a page in any of his books and not catch something of the intensity with whcih he loves the souls of men. The pen looses none of its enthusiasm, power and burning challenge. His books have been used by the Holy Spirit to sear into the very depths of my own soul and have had a tremendous influence on my personal life and ministry. As an author he exemplifies a passion for souls.

As a poet and hymn-writer his songs are loved and sung around the world. Who can listen to that great hymn, "Then Jesus Came", and to "God Understands" or "The Glory of His Presence", without feeling the passion of this man for the souls of men? In scores of meetings I have seen the hearts of people melted and broken by the singing of these songs. His best known hymn, "Saved", has been a testimony to multitudes. As a hymn writer he exemplifies a passion for souls.

As a man his utter consecration and devotion to the cause of our Lord Jesus Christ and the advancement of His Kingdom have given new hope, courage and inspiration to thousands of young preachers. His devoted prayerlife and his Spirit filled personal life have been a blessing to thousands. No one can be in his presence for five minutes without seeing the flame of his soul. As a man he exemplifies a passion for souls.

It seems that only once in a generation does God raise up a man with so many talents and gifts. The driving passion of this man's life will live throughout generations to come, should Christ tarry. Certainly no man in our day is more qualified to write on a passion for souls. As this book goes forth, it is our earnest prayer that others, too, might catch this burden, vision and flaming passion.

Billy Graham

The following is a song Oswald J. Smith wrote in 1935.

THE MASTER'S CALL

Have you heard the Master's call?

Will you go forsaking all?

Millions still in sin and shame

Ne'er have heard the Saviour's Name.

Some may give and some may pray,

But for you He calls today;
Will you answer, "Here am I"
Or must Jesus pass you by?

Have you heard their bitter cry?
Can you bear to see them die?
Thousands who in darkness night
Never yet have seen the Light?
Soon 'twill be too late to go,
And your love for Jesus show;
Oh then quickly speed away,
Tarry not another day.

What if you refuse to go?
Someone then will never know
Of the Saviour kind and true,
And the blame will rest on you.
Will you, then, forsaking all,
Gladly heed the Master's Call?
Answer quickly, "Lord, send me
to the lands beyond the sea."

I have found that in every poem, song, sermon or prayer I was touched by his passion for mankind and their soul. I often wished that if I would ever have a son, I would call him Oswald. But the Lord knew better.

Now since I have wet your appetite for this man of God and the service he rendered to mankind, do you still wonder how I could pass by the world famous "Maple Leaf Gardens" in Toronto where thousands of people attended and where the police had to control the traffic to let pedestrians cross the street by the hundreds, and it never tempted me to go with the crowd to watch hockey, but instead, I walked to church to get spiritual food. I gained every time, where the hockey fans lost, if nothing else, their time and money.

It was my privilege to learn to know this man of God in his prime of life. He celebrated his 50th birthday in the winter of 1940. To my knowledge he is still alive. The last time I saw him was on T.V. several years ago when Billy Graham conducted a crusade in Toronto. Dr. Smith made the invocation and welcomed Billy Graham to Toronto. He must be ninety-

five years old bynow. What a harvest of souls he has brought into the Kingdom of God! I shall never forget Dr. Oswald J. Smith. For that experience alone it was worth while for me to be in Toronto. "God Bless You, Oswald!"

BACK TO THE SHOE REPAIR

Let's go back to where I left off earlier. I already mentioned that I made my own meals in the basement where I worked. I bought all my groceries from a small store across the street. What impressed me when I first walked into this store was that the storekeeper, Mr. Peters, was sitting behind the counter reading a big Bible. I asked him, "Are you a Christian?" "Yes," he said, "but I haven't been one for very long." I asked him how he had become a Christian. He told me his story.

He said that he and his family were Greeks. Their religious background was Greek Orthodox, but while they lived in Greece, they were not allowed to read the Bible. But he had a desire to know what was in the Bible, so when they moved to Canada the first thing he did after settling down was go to the Bible Society and buy a great big Greek Bible. He said it was fascinating to read what God had spoken to men. He said that it had taken him sometime to see himself as a sinner, but he didn't go to a priest to confess his sins. Instead he came to Jesus and asked him to come into his heart and life and forgive all his sin. A real joy and peace flooded his soul. Whenever time allowed in the store, he continued reading the Bible.

Then he found Ephesians 4:20 - 24 where Paul writes, "If so be that you have heard him and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That you put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the Spirit of your mind; and that you put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." This had spoken to him, that Christians were to live a holy life. He then studied what it meant to live a holy life. He said he had been a heavy smoker. When he found out that smoking didn't belong to a holy life, he went into the basement and threw all his cigarettes

into the furnace and had not smoked since.

When I heard this I was reminded of my grandfather who had a similar experience. I asked this man where he went to church. He said that there were so many churches in Toronto that he didn't know which one to trust. So whenever I could I took him along with me to the Peoples Church. He enjoyed it alot.

My dear friend who reads these lines: Are you a born again believer? Are you a happy Christian? If not, I invite you to my Saviour Jesus Christ. He forgives all your sin. He can give you the real joy and purpose in life. In fact, he is waiting for you to call upon him right now. You too can join the Christian band that is on its way to Glory.

Too soon the four months were over and the new couple from Albania arrived. Before my work was over the older gentleman invited the young couple and myself to his place one evening for a welcome home party and to get to know the bride.

During those four months I had made my own living and had saved over \$100.00 dollars in cash. One day I decided to take the bus to Vineland which was about 75 miles away, to look for a job in a fruit orchard. I had never seen apples, cherries, plums or peaches grow on trees.

I found work at the Fretz farm. They had fifty acres of fruit and said they would need help but only around the middle of May. I told them that they could count on me to be there in May. The next day I went back to Toronto.

I bought a newspaper and found a farmer who needed help for a month with spring seeding. I phoned him and made arrangements to work. I told him that I was experienced and was willing to help him until the 15th of May.

The next day I went and bought myself an "Overland" car for \$80.00. I then tried to get my driver's license. There were about six men who took drivers out for a test drive. They failed most men at least once or twice. I took two tests and they failed me both times. Some experienced truck drivers were really angry with them. When I realized that these men were using this money for the tests to make extra money for themselves since we were still partly in the

depression, I loaded my belongings into my car and left the next morning for the farmer in Minit Ontario.

I told the farmer about my drivers' test experience in Toronto. He suggested that I go to their town and take the test there. So I took the test and passed.

At this farm I was again milking the cows morning and evening, and working the field during the day. The man was a very quiet person and this made me feel uncomfortable at times. I wished he had been different because I never knew what he was thinking. His wife was more friendly, and their two children were very friendly. I had a good time with the children.

The people never went to church. I felt sorry for them. So on Sundays the children came with me into my car which was parked in the yard and I told them Bible stories and taught them songs and choruses. I was glad that I was never reprimanded by the parents for doing that.

When the seeding was done I left for the Fretz farm in Vineland. They had a separate house for their hired help. On the main floor was a large kitchen and dining room. In the attic upstairs we slept on mattresses on the floor. This did not appeal to me, but there was nothing I could do.



My "Overland" car at the Fretz fruit farm in Vineland, Ontario, 1939.

In the farm work I was next in seniority to the year-round hired man and could work until late in the fall until all the work was done. Next in line was Steve, a Ukranian and Bill who was Polish. These two argued alot about politics and also as they played cards in the evenings. There was also a Ukranian widow and then there were four French boys from Moncton, New Brunswick. All the men slept side by side on the floor upstairs. I was the only Christian in the group.

I had bought a little kerosene cookstove in Toronto and did all my cooking on it. It was an amazing unit. Every morning I got up for my devotions, and for a good breakfast. The French boys usually got downstairs about five minutes before eight and had no time to wash or make a meal. They opened up a can of pork and beans, gulped it down and went to work. They were often late.

First we picked strawberries, but there was not enough work for the French boys, so they hitchhiked all the way to B.C. for strawberry picking, because they were told that the season was later in B.C. After about three weeks they were back, dirty, hungry and with no money. I quickly made them a meal and then took them for a swim in Lake Erie which was only a few miles away. They were so happy to be back in Ontario again and to live a little more normal life.

After the strawberries came the cherry picking. What a treat to be able to eat as many cherries as we liked. Our pay was \$1.25 a day. We worked from eight to twelve and then from one to five. I always made a full course meal at noon and was ready in one hour.

On Sundays I went to the M.B. Church in Vineland and got to know more people. The G. Hueberts and Henry and Susie Peters also came to Vineland for the summer and worked for tomatoe farmers. We usually met on Sundays at the G. Walls where the Hueberts were living. Here I also got to know the John A. Toews. They had come from Tabor College in Hillsboro, Kansas to earn money to go back to school. At that time they were a young couple with only one child. Mrs. Wall, Katie Huebert and Mrs. J. A. Toews were sisters. Even though I was a bachelor and not related, they always made me feel welcome in their group.



My good friends, George & Katie Huebert
and family and Henry & Susan Peters, in
Toronto, 1939.

One Sunday afternoon I took the Hueberts and the Toews' to Niagara Falls in my car. We took pictures there. On the way there I had a flat tire which I fixed by the side of the road. That was a more common occurrence in those years than it is today.

QUIET HOURS WITH GOD

At times when I felt really lonesome, I took my Bible, got into my car and drove around until I found a solitary quiet place. Then I would stop the car, take my Bible and a blanket and would spread the blanket on the grass. There I read the Word of God and had real close fellowship with my Saviour Jesus Christ.

At times God filled my heart with His presence and joy so that I fell on my face before Him and worshipped Him. When he revealed a certain gripping truth to me that I felt I should tell to the world, I opened my mouth and preached as if I had a great audience. But when I really looked around, I had preached to the birds and the squirrels.

Many, many times the Lord has spoken to me through His Word and filled my heart with His presence. Those are times of renewal, and refreshing when we spend time in the Word and in prayer. That is

also a time where he equips us to go out and testify for Him.

Praise God for the quiet hours in our lives!

UNEXPECTED SURPRISE

One Sunday in July an announcement was made that on the following Sunday there would be no service, but everyone was invited to attend a Song Festival in Kitchener. Whoever needed transportation was told to leave their name at the Boese Brothers cannery. The Boese Brothers would take a truckload of people to Kitchener. So I put my name on the list.

When we arrived in Kitchener that most beautiful sunny morning, there were people from all the Mennonite churches in Ontario. I heard people say, "All you can see is heaven and Mennonites!" Choirs had joined together for practising and now they sang together to the glory of God. Like many others I watched and listened to the different hymns sung by the many groups.

Who do you think I saw in one choir?! I could not believe it at first, but a second look convinced me that it was Miss Katie Martens who I had met three years earlier at my brother John's farm when she was teaching DVBS in July 1936. It gave me such a lift to see her that I became very restless. The question came to my mind, "What brings her to Ontario? Is she married?" During the noon hour I watched to see who she was with. Was she with a man or with the single ladies? To my pleasant surprise she walked only with the singles. Where could she live? I watched her from a distance and made sure she wouldn't see me.

During the noon hour I met Mr. and Mrs. Peter Dueck from Leamington who told me that my former girlfriend in Brazil had married and also that she had died within a year of her marriage. So here at this Song Festival I had both a pleasant surprise and also a shock. But I also saw the leading of God in all of this, to know for sure that the old tie was broken and that I really was free.

After lunch the services continued, and I could see Katie Martens again. But all the way back to Vineland I had questions in my mind, "How will God undertake for me in the future? How long will it take

for me to get established? Where and when could I support a wife? When will I see her again? Where?"

"Behold you are fair, my love; behold you are fair." Songs of Solomon 4:11

My heart was excited. I wished I could get to know her but where could I find her? Most of the people were strangers to me, with the exception of a few friends. When I got home that evening, I thanked God for that great day of blessing and that I had been able to see the one I loved deep down in my heart. I prayed daily for her. My prayer always was, "Lord, if it is Your will, You can bring us together some day. The rest I leave up to You."

BACK TO EARTH AGAIN

That Sunday night I only had a short sleep. My thoughts were far away and my mind was like a puzzle that needed to be put together. "But reader, please don't be discouraged. The best is yet to come."

Now the busy season started on the fruit farm. First the early apples, early peaches and then the later apples and peaches; pears, plums and finally cutting the grapes. All this fruit from the fifty acre farm was shipped day and night with the three big Diamond Trucks to Kingston, Ontario where it was sold in an open market. None of it went to a cannery or cold storage. The set up was tremendous.

The Fretz's also had a barn full of pigs that had a shine on their skin from all the so-called spoiled fruit they got to eat. We ate as much fruit as we wanted whenever we felt like it. This was my reason



Joe and I eating peaches in Vineland, Ontario, 1939.

for going to Vineland to work. Nearly every evening we went swimming in Lake Erie. There were many young people there, but I didn't have anything in common with them.

TWO NIGHT DISTURBANCES

Since I had a car, I was asked to drive people to the doctor or other places. One Sunday night a man from the street walked up the stairs to our bedroom. (Our doors were never locked.) He called for the man who owned the car in the yard. When I told him that the car was mine, he told me that he had been on his way home and had noticed that there was a man in the ditch beside the road. He had tried to help the man get out, but the man was drunk and all efforts had failed. He asked if I would go and pull him out and bring him home.

I dressed quickly, got into my car and went to look for him. I drove a ways, stopped, walked up to the ditch, looked into it, listened, but could not see anything. So I shouted, "Anybody in trouble?" There was no response, so I repeated the question and in a distance I could hear a grunt. I walked in the direction of the sound and soon saw a figure trying to get out of the ditch. When I got closer, I recognized the man. I said, "Joe, what are you doing here?" He was so drunk that he just murmured, and I could not understand him.

I lay down flat on my stomach, reached down to him and said, "Give me your hand," and I pulled him out of the miry ditch. It reminded me about Jesus. He too reached down to me and lifted me out of the miry clay and put me on solid ground. I put Joe beside me in the car and took him home with me. I dragged him into the house, made him comfortable on the kitchen floor and put a large dish in front of him and told him that if he felt like vomiting he should use the pan. I went back upstairs to sleep for whatever time that was left.

In the morning when I got downstairs he had gone to bed. The flobr looked terrible with vomit all over, so I cleaned it up.

Next day he told me that he had gone to see his friends and had taken too much wine. Thinking that he

could make it home, he had left in the dark. I told him that Jesus Christ could help him to get rid of the drinking habit, and also showed him the way of salvation but it seemed as if he could not understand it. His priest had never told him that.

A GIRL IN TROUBLE

I told you that I was the number two hired man. Well, Number one was a married man with two children. He was seldom home. He drove one of the big Diamond Trucks to Kingston. They had a nineteen year old girl helping them in the house with the children. This family had their own house in the same yard.

One night when we were all sleeping the hired man's wife came up the stairs and called me. She asked me to pick up the girl who stayed with them. Someone had phoned and told her that the girl was lying beside the road and could not get up. She also told me where I could find her.

I got into my car to hunt for the girl. When I found her, I was shocked to see her in such a terrible state. She was lying on her side. She could not get up on her own, nor could she walk. Her whole body was shaking and shivering. She looked filthy. I picked her up and carried her to my car. Then I took her home, and carried her right into her bedroom. In my heart I felt very sorry that this young girl was going through such a horrible experience. The next day the lady who had called me told me that this girl had been with boys all evening and part of the night. "Oh," my hearts' cry was, "I pray to God that the youth of our day would realize the real consequences of sin and give their life over to God and not to Satan and the pleasures of this world."

By the end of October all the fruit was picked and sold. The hired help had all left for home. Before the French boys left, one of them said, "Abe, come home with us. I have a nice sister. She would be just right for you." I said, "Thank you, but God has a special one for me and I can wait." With that we waved good-bye and they left. We never met again. But I had given them the gospel while working together that summer.

In the meantime the Second World War had started.

We were told not to speak any German on the streets or in public. Some people believed that the war would last for ten years, since Hitler wanted to conquer all the neighbouring countries, including Russia. It certainly gave us something to think about. And I was far away from my immediate family.

My thoughts were often, "What will the future hold for me?" But one thing I was sure of, and that was that the Lord was with me. That was my comfort.

ANOTHER NEW VENTURE

The time had also come for me to leave Vineland. All summer I had planned that I would go to Kitchener to look for work in a factory. Before I left Vineland Peter Duerksen came to see me. He said that if I went to Kitchener I should let Rev. H.H. Janzen know that their daughter Katie was in the Kitchener Hospital. He wanted Rev. Janzen to visit his daughter. I had learned to know Katie Duerksen because we sang together in a quartet at young peoples. I had also been at the Duerksen home visiting her brother Peter, but I hadn't known that she was ill. I promised to convey the message.

As I was driving into Kitchener, I found myself behind a streetcar. It slowed down and then stopped. Out of the streetcar stepped Rev. H. P. Toews from Winnipeg. I recognized him immediately and honked my horn. He looked and I waved at him to come to my car. When he got in I asked him where he would like to go. He said that he was going to Rev. H. H. Janzen's and that he was preaching in his church that evening. I said that I would take him there if he had the address, because I had a message for Rev. Janzen. We got there around four o'clock and they were expecting Rev. Toews. I gave Rev. Janzen my message and wanted to leave to look for a place to stay, but he said that I should at least stay for supper and we could go to church together and that he would arrange something for me. Here again the Lord had provided.

I enjoyed the fellowship with these two preachers. We had supper and all went to church for the evening service. After the service Rev. Janzen introduced me to an elderly couple, the Rempels. He said they would give me accomodation for the night.

When I was made comfortable in their home, Mr. Rempel took me into his basement and showed me all his strange tools and the big clock that he was making. I was very impressed with the talents of this man. I told the Rempels that I had come to Kitchener to look for work. I wondered if they could give me some idea of where to look for work. He told me that he was working for the Kauffman Rubber Company but he was sure there were no openings there.

I got up the next morning and went into the kitchen. Mr. Rempel had already left for work, and Mrs. Rempel waited patiently for me, because she wanted to share breakfast with me. She asked me to sit down. Then she gave me a Bible to read and we had devotions together. I thought to myself, "What a nice lady she is!" While we were talking at breakfast I found out that the Mrs. Peters who had taken me into her home in Toronto was their daughter. This was an extra pleasant surprise for me. What a Biblical family to open their home to a stranger like myself. I was very grateful for their hospitality. The rest of the day I was job hunting and paging through the papers. I stayed at the Rempel's for one more night and then decided to go back to Toronto to look for work, trusting that the Lord had something in store for me. I was also lonesome for my friends, the Hueberts and also for the Peoples Church. After settling with the Rempels for my stay at their place and saying goodbye, I was on my way.

The first thing I did when I got back to Toronto was rent a room for \$1.25 a week. Then I bought a paper and found a job in a shoe factory. I started work the following day.

My job was to put the uppers over the lasts and to get them ready for the welting and for the leather soles and heels. For me it was an eye opener to see how shoes were made in a factory. Some people cut the upper leather with a pattern. Others stitched uppers together with the lining. Four of us, (a Russian, a Jew, a Hungarian and myself) took the sewn uppers, put the heel and toe stiffening in, put the insole on the last, and pulled the uppers over the last with special tools. We got them ready for the next process which was putting on the soles and rubber heels. Others trimmed the sole and heel on a trimmer and then came

the polishers. From here ladies sorted them and put them into shoe boxes. The last ones to work with the shoes put them in the store house and from there they were shipped to the wholesalers or to the stores.

My boss was a Jew and I must give him credit because he had much patience with me. There were a total of thirty-six employees and we made 200 pair of shoes in a day. The first two weeks were the hardest for me because my hands had to learn how to handle the hand tools. I had to work quickly or we would be behind. At the beginning I worked hard and only made ten to twelve pair of shoes a day. My hands got very sore. By the time I had learned all the tricks, my hands were accustomed to the tools and I also made fifty pair a day. All workers were union members, but the boss never asked me to join. I appreciated that.

When I got to work one morning the workers were standing in groups and talking. Some were angry. Others cursed. I could tell there was something that made them unhappy.

One day in January 1940 the boss came in and pulled the lever on the switch that shut off all the machines. He said, "The strike is on. We need a new settlement." I wondered what would happen next. Of course I was not informed about the problem and since I was not a union member I never did find out. The strike lasted for about a week.

We were paired off and told where and when we were to walk the streets with our placard around our necks. I was also asked to take part in the picket line. The most interesting thing was that I was on strike duty with the young man who cursed the most and who I knew the least. Our time to walk the picket line was from twelve midnight to four in the morning. Four hours of walking back and forth in front of our factory, to prevent anyone from entering the premises.

Here God gave me an opportunity to get to know this young man. In the middle of the night I was able to speak to him about his soul. I found out that no one had ever talked to him about the Lord before. When he found out that I was sincere and had something he did not have, he began to listen and also to ask questions. He promised to come along with me to the Peoples Church and to attend the full evening service, together with the "Back Home Radio Hour". He enjoyed

the music and the choir singing. He had never heard such preaching before. It took no persuasion to have him come time and time again. Even on Sunday morning we walked to church together until he finally gave his heart over to God. A year later when I was back in Manitoba he wrote me that he had even joined the choir.

I noticed a different atmosphere when the factory called us back to work. This young man must have told the other workers that I was a Christian and did not appreciate them swearing and using dirty language.

Some mornings when I came in they were having their good time, as they saw it, but when I walked in, they shut up. This showed me that God was with me. I gained respect and favor with the boss and with the fellow workers.

The last day before Christmas the boss had ordered a few barrels of beer for his workers. When the whistle blew to stop working, the barrels were rolled in for anyone to help himself. When the boss saw that I didn't go to have my share, he called me into his office. I wondered if he would fire me. Instead he asked me, "Abe, why don't you have your beer? It's free!" I told him, "I don't drink." Then he pulled out his drawer and offered me a bottle of wine. I thanked him but declined. This surprised him. I told him that I was a Christian and had never had wine or beer in my life. With that he wished me a Merry Christmas and I left.

I enjoyed my holidays. I attended all the church services I possibly could.

In the meantime I had found a place to live that was closer to my work. It was on 94 Gould St. I was now within walking distance of work. In the evenings when there were no services in church, I worked on my correspondence course which I finished in 1940. Evenings during the week I also attended the city missions where people from the street would come and listen to the singing and preaching. After the service they would get a meal.

One evening I sat beside a young man who was shivering. He told me that he had no job and no money and had very poor underwear. After the service I asked him to come along with me and I would give him some. So I gave him a heavy pair of underwear that I

had not used since living in Winnipeg.

There were many poor men walking the streets of Toronto. They often stood on a street corner, asking pedestrians for ten or twenty-five cents. They would say, "I haven't had a meal today." I never gave them money, but rather took them to a restaurant and paid for their meal. Then I sat with them and talked with them while they ate. I also gave them tracts to read. I believe most of them wanted the money for drinking.

One day while I was working in the factory, the boss came and called me into his office. I wondered what he wanted. I couldn't think of anything I had done wrong, so my little heart started pounding faster. He asked me to sit down. Then he told me that he wanted me to take on another mans work. There was an elderly Englishman who did all the lasting for sample shoes which were used for demonstration purposes in different wholesales and stores. He said that he had observed my work and that he wanted to promote me. I said, "What will that man say?" He said, "That's my business." He wanted me to start the next day. It really did not make me feel any better, but I obeyed my boss.

In reading the newspapers and listening to the people talk, I felt uneasy about the war in Europe. By this time I was thirty two and a half years old, and still single. I wondered if I would receive my call to the army. Since I was alone in Toronto, I might never see my family again.

So I decided to go back to Manitoba at the end of March. I wrote my brother John that he could count on me coming and asked if he could find a job for me on the farm.

A week before I left I told my boss what I had in mind. He pleaded with me to stay with him. He said, "I plan to sell this factory and move to Montreal and I would like you to become my foreman in the new factory." I told him that I appreciated him saying that, but I also told him how I felt, since the war was on and I had made up my mind to leave by the end of the month. Whether he ever sold the factory and moved to Montreal I never heard.

I have often thanked God that I had learned to know the Hueberts. They had become part of my life by this time. I was at their place nearly every Sunday.

Now finally the day and the hour had come for us to part. I went to see them for the last time. We read the Scriptures, had prayer and said goodbye. I left with a sad heart. The next day I took the train and was on my way back to La Salle, Manitoba.

My nephews John and Isaak came to pick me up from the station. Being away for a year and a half gave us much to talk about. John's family always received me with open arms. I was always made to feel welcome.

The next day John told me that I could have a job at Bill Horton's for the summer if I wanted. I went down to see him and made arrangements. Bill worked for the government and was only home for the weekends. He wanted me to run his farm together with his wife Bess and the three little boys. They only had a very small house with two bedrooms, a large kitchen and dining room. I slept in the kitchen on the couch. I started working there the second week in April 1940.

All went well. I knew all about farming. I used horses and tractors. In spring I even started them off with a good patch of strawberries, since I had learned about strawberries in Ontario. Bill came home every Friday night and we always planned the week ahead together. I never had any problem with his wife and children and I behaved as best I could. the boys were six, eight and ten. They took a liking to me because I told them Bible stories and sang with them. I felt sorry for the family, because they never went to church or Sunday School.

When harvest was finished and my time came to a close, Bill approached me one day and asked me to stay on with them. He had a plan for me, if I would agree to it. He planned to build a large chicken barn as well as a pig barn. He wanted me to raise the pigs and chickens, using his grain to feed them and then we would share the profit 50 - 50. It sounded like a good offer and it proved that he was happy with me. But I had other plans. I wanted to go back to Winnipeg or to Kildonan to see if I could get work there. Bill was disappointed, and the boys stood and cried when I packed up my things and said goodbye to them. Nevertheless we parted as friends. Deep within me I felt I was to go to Kildonan. So keep on reading, the best is yet to come.

I GO INTO BUSINESS FOR MYSELF IN 1941

My brother Dietrich was already established in North Kildonan. He had a lovely wife and two children. He had a job at Klassen Brothers, stamping washers from heavy sheet metal. Even if it wasn't what he really wanted to do all his life, it gave him food for the family and money to pay for the rent. At the same time he was very active in choir work. He had a male choir in Kildonan (which I also joined) and the Elmwood M.B. Church choir in Winnipeg. On Sunday afternoons Dietrich also sang with a group on the Winnipeg Bible Institute Radio Program.

Dietrich and Anne offered me an upstairs room in their home, so I could be part of the family. Annie, was an excellent cook and she made very tasty meals which were a real treat for me. I was treated as a brother and family member.

I must honestly say that all of my brothers at various times took pity on me when I was in need. I was with my brother John and his family the longest. I stayed at Peter's place for a week or two at times when he needed me for some remodeling in his house in the winter, as well as other times. My last place of abode was with my youngest brother Dietrich.

It was nice for me to be with them because I could observe their home and family life; how they coped with problems and also how they raised their children. I have always had a warm spot in my heart for children, and Dietrich and Anne's children found that out too. During meals I often had one child and sometimes two on my lap. Sometimes I also fed them. I have always had a good relationship with my brothers, with their wives and their children. I thank God for such family ties.

Arriving in Kildonan in the autumn was not very promising in terms of work. I got together with Victor Willms (a good friend of Dietrich's) and together we decided that we would raise a large batch of pigs that winter. He had the barn and promised to look after the feed. I would take care of the pigs.

At least twice a week he brought a few 45 gallon barrels of buttermilk from the creamery, which these creatures really enjoyed. After four to five months we had them up to 200 pounds and so we sold them.

Victor and I split the profit and then we were free to go our own ways. By this time, Victor Willms had built up a fairly good egg delivery business and only had these pigs with me as a side line. I should mention here that Victor's father, Heinrich Willms, was my high school teacher. (They were both very bright men.) "Thank you Victor, for what you have meant in my life!"

East Kildonan business area consisted of about two blocks and various types of businesses in it. There was a barber, a drug store, grocery store, post office, and taylor, a meat market and also a shoemaker.

One spring day I walked into the shoe repair shop and found the Polish shoemaker feeling very downhearted. As I talked with him, he told me all his troubles. His children were grown up and had left home. A few months earlier his wife had left him and had gone to Ontario. Now he wanted to sell his business and go look for her. I told him that I felt sorry for his family situation, but if he wanted to sell his business, we should discuss the price. He quoted a price and I told him I would buy the business from him. The next day I paid him in cash and was the new owner of the shoe repair business. I didn't like the building the business was in, so I rented space next to the Ukranian taylor and set up all my machines. I built a counter, a drawer for the money and before long, I had a flourishing business.

Although the war in Europe was still raging, the future looked much brighter for me. People had more money. Houses were being built and people were finding work in different industries. At times I was so busy that I had to hire extra help. I bought a sole stitcher, which helped me alot by eliminating the need for hand stitching.

Summer came and I had a smile for everyone who entered my shop. One afternoon, a single nurse came to pick up her shoes and left a nice bouquet of flowers for me to enjoy. Another time a single lady came and brought me some fruit. Another girl asked me to join their family for a Sunday afternoon picnic, but I declined. All this attention made me realize that they were letting me know that they were still available. I was friendly but didn't encourage any of

them, because I believed that God had someone special for me. Not that I thought that I was so special (I knew best who I was), but because of the person God had shown me in the summer of 1936 at my brother John's farm and then again three years later in Kitchener, Ontario. I just could not forget Miss Katie Martens! I always prayed, "Lord, if it is Your will, You can bring us together. You can cause me to prosper so that I also can support a wife." I was in no particular hurry.

GOD BEGAN TO ANSWER MY PRAYER

The last Sunday in June 1941 we had no evening service in our church, so I felt that I should go to the Elmwood M.B. Church that evening to attend the young peoples program. When I got into church I looked for a place to sit. After I was comfortably seated, I noticed two young ladies sitting about three benches ahead of me. One was a stranger to me, but the other one seemed familiar. As I sat and watched her, I wondered who she resembled. She turned sideways and then I recognized her! It was "Katie Martens"! My blood pressure rose and my heart pounded faster. This time I was much closer to her than I had been in Kitchener Ontario.

Then a voice inside told me, "Abe, now it's time to put your faith into action." "Yes, Lord, but how shall I go about it? She is a total stranger to me. She only met me once, five years ago at my brothers farm in La Salle, Manitoba." What made her come all the way back to Manitoba? It seemed to me that she had first followed me to Ontario and now she had followed me back to Winnipeg. I felt certain that the Lord had his hand in it and that He was giving me one more change. But would God really give me such a beautiful young lady to enrich my life, for a lifetime? I was overwhelmed by this thought and silently prayed, "Lord, Your will be done." But how could I make contact with her, since we were actually strangers to each other?

By the time the service was over, I realized that I had not been aware of anything that had gone on because of my surprise and excitement. After the closing prayer we all left the church. I walked out

ahead of these two ladies and hid behind the steps, to see where they were going. They walked on the sidewalk and I followed them from a distance, thinking, "When, where and how? Shall we ever meet again?"

Of course Miss Katie Martens had no idea who was following her or what I was thinking. I knew it would not be fair to walk up to her and to ask her for a date to propose to her, so I decided I would leave it in the Lord's hand.

By now a great disturbance and excitement was going on inside me. Monday, July 1st was a holiday and all businesses were closed. I decided to go to my shop and to give it a thorough cleaning so it would be ready for work on Tuesday. On the way home I crossed the yard of my friend, Cornie Buller. When he saw me, he stopped me and said, "Abe, let's sit down under this tree and visit awhile." We both sat down and talked about ordinary events and all at once he said, "Abe, why don't you get married? I think it's high time! We have all kinds of nice girls, young ladies, or young widows in our church," he said. "They are waiting for someone to come."

"Yes, I know, Cornie, I am waiting too."

"But Abe, haven't you anyone in mind yet? How old are you?"

"I'll be thirty-four in August."

"Well you better make up your mind or else you'll stay a bachelor all your life!"

"That all depends on how the Lord will lead," I said, "but since you are pressing me, I want to ask you a question. Can you keep a secret, Cornie?"

"Yes, I can."

"You are the very first person to whom I will reveal my secret," I said, "since you are so anxious for me to be married. I have been praying for a certain young lady for five years now and have seen her a total of three times. Once in La Salle, Manitoba, once in Kitchener, Ontario and last night in the Elmwood M.B. Church. All I know about her is her name. I don't know where she comes from or where she is going. I am at the edge of a mystery."

He asked, "What's her name?"

"Katie Martens."

"Oh," he said, "I know her. We worked together

on a farm my first year in Canada."

"Oh, you know her?"

"Yes. Since you saw her in church last night with another young lady, I can tell you where she is tomorrow, since I know her best friend also." "You know," he said, "I will contact her after work tomorrow. I will invite her to our place for supper and you come too, so that you two can get acquainted. Then you can take over from there."

"Oh no," I said. "Thank you, but I don't move that quickly in important issues. But stop at my shop tomorrow and let me know where she is staying in Winnipeg."

"Okay, I will let you know tomorrow," he said. With that I left for home.

All the next day I wondered what news my friend would bring me. I was very curious. My secret was out, but I trusted his promise to keep it a secret.

Evening came and as promised, Cornie stopped, parked his bicycle by my shoe repair window, came inside and told me the news.

He said, "I stopped at her friend, Helen Hamm's, and asked her about Katie Martens. She told me that Katie left on Monday for Hepburn, Saskatchewan to work in the West Coast Children's Mission. I am sorry, Abe, but that's all I can do for you."

I thanked him for finding this out for me. Now I could see the hand of God in the whole situation.

Ever since I had broken my relationship with Liese in Brazil, I had prayed, "Lord, give me someone who loves you above all else. Someone who has a heart for lost souls, so that if you should ever call me into your service someday, I would get full support from my wife." Now I could see how God was leading and preparing the way. Although I did not know the outcome, I thanked the Lord for what he had already done for me.

As you continue reading, you will see how God had prepared the way before me instead of me making plans of my own as to how, when or where we should meet.

From reading earlier pages, you will remember that I was in Toronto from 1938 to 1940. During that time I became close friends with the George D. Hueberts. By this time Mr. Huebert had graduated from the Bible College and was going to teach in Hepburn

Bible School in Saskatchewan. Since I had his address, and also had confidence in him that he would do his best for me, I wrote to him about my interest in Katie Martens, who by that time was working for the West Coast Children's Mission at Hague Ferry. In the letter to Mr. Huebert I asked him to find out if she was free or if she was engaged to anyone.

The Hueberts invited Katie to their home for supper to get acquainted. They showed her pictures of me and watched for her reactions. Of course Katie did not know the background of this invitation and so she didn't show much of a reaction.

Katie had been working with Tina Toews at this mission for six weeks and now Tina was getting married to George Giesbrecht. Goerge and Tina were going to take over the mission work and Katie Martens was supposed to go north alone to work among the Doukhobors. She did not think that this was Biblical, because Jesus had sent his disciples out by twos and his disciples were men. So she stayed in Hepburn for about two weeks at the G.W. Peters, until a decision could be made or else until someone would volunteer to go north with her. The G. Peters were Katie Martens' friends. They had attended Winkler Bible School together in the early 1930's. Mr. Peters was now the principal of the Hepburn Bible School. It was during these two weeks that I had written my first letter.



Katie Martens & Tina Toews in their Sunday School Mission at Hauge Fairy, Saskatchewan.

One day Mr. Peters called Katie Martens into his office and told her that a young man from Winnipeg had written to them asking for her address so he could become better acquainted with her. This came as a surprise to her. Who could he be?

After Tina Toews' and George Giesbrecht's wedding, some friends (Wiebes) asked her to go along with them to Aberdeen Saskatchewan for a week. While she was visiting there in Aberdeen she received my first letter. One of the boys had come into the kitchen and said, "Here is a letter from your boyfriend." She replied, "I have no boyfriend." Mr. G. Huebert had sent me Miss Martens' address, and in the evening of September 24, 1941, I felt an inner compulsion to write my first letter, under prayer, to Miss Katie Martens.

OUR CORRESPONDENCE

The following are a series of letters Katie and I wrote, which she kept.

September 24, 1941

Dear Sister Katie Martens:

Please excuse me, if I venture to write to you at this time.

First of all I wish you God's peace, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and His richest blessing in the work you are doing for the Lord.

When you were in Winnipeg this summer I missed the opportunity of meeting you, but I was told that you had gone west to work in a mission. I decided to write to my friend, Brother G. D. Huebert in Hepburn, Saskatchewan, to obtain your address, which he sent me at once.

Dear Sister, in this letter I come to you with one question, which you may examine before the Lord. Namely, "How do you look at your future? Are you free at the present time or do you have a binding engagement with a brother? Would you prefer to stay single in the future, in order to serve the Lord?" If the latter should be the case, then I would wish to be forgotten in the future, and this writing should be disregarded.

But if you are prayerfully looking for a brother who would love you, and with whom you would want to share life's joys and sorrows, and work together in God's Kingdom, than I would want to let you know today, dear sister, that I have prayed to God, "If it is His will" that He should bring the two of us together.

I have observed your life as far as it is known to me, and I feel in my heart that you could be the person my heart is longing for.

"But not mine, but God's will be done." I would in no way want to force the issue, but just let you know that there is a heart that goes out to you and prays for you. I believe we know each other by sight only, but not in character.

I will give you ample time to consider the matter. You are also free to write and ask others about me and about my character. You are free to do as you please. If you feel that you would like to correspond with me in the future, or drop the matter altogether, then I would ask you to kindly let me know, either way. My address is:

Abram Friesen
853 Henderson Hwy.
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Sincerely, your brother in Christ,

I wrote this poem on the back of the letter.
The counsel and the will of Jesus
Is the best and counts alone.
Only he who's calm in His presence,
And lets Jesus be ruler of all,
Can always find rest in Him.

Author unknown.

As I had taken my first step by faith, I asked the Lord to bring this letter safely into her hands. Time went by and I wondered what would happen in the future. All I could say was, "Lord, not mine, but Your will be done." In about two weeks I had a response.

Hepburn, Saskatchewan
October 7, 1941

Dear Brother Abram Friesen:

Last Friday, October 2nd, I received your significant letter. At the present I cannot give you a decision. But this much I can say and that is I don't know where the Lord wants me to be. One thing I do know is that I feel that my whole life belongs to the Lord. If the Lord should show me that I should go into foreign missions overseas, then I would have to go. Therefore I cannot engage myself with any man, unless he is of the same mind.

If you are of the same mind, we could correspond with each other, in order to become better acquainted.

We had a very special day today. Mr. Clarence Benson from Chicago is here and is giving lectures on the importance of Sunday School work. He says that instructing the children in their youth and winning them for the Lord is the most important work of the church.

I have worked in a children's mission now for six weeks. I have enjoyed the work very much and also experienced the nearness of the Lord. He will not forsake those who trust in Him. Where I will be working in the future I do not know. The mission board plans to send me up north, but at present I have no partner. I do not want to go alone. The Lord Jesus sent his disciples out by two's and Paul did not go alone either. I will close for now. It would be best to send your next letter to the same address as the first letter.

With friendly greetings,

Katie Martens

When I received this letter, I could not help but thank God for the consecrated spirit I sensed in those lines. I could already feel a oneness; something that we had in common, and that was serving our Lord and Master, together.

Since I had written to Katie Martens that she was free to write and find out about me, she had written to her former teacher and preacher, Rev. Abram Peters,

in Winnipeg, whom she had known all her life.

When he received her letter asking about me, and also giving him my business address, he came to see me in my shop. I had no idea who Katie would write to, or even if she would write at all.

On October 11, 1941 I noticed Rev. A. B. Peters walking outside, looking for a number on the building. When he found the number, he came in and said, "Good day, brother Friesen! Is this your business?"

"Yes," I said. "I bought it in April of this year."

"How is it going?"

"Very good. As you can see, I have lots of work."

To this point I had no idea why he had come. Then he broke the news. He said, "Guess who I received a letter from today?" For a moment I could not think of who he might have received a letter from, but then it dawned on me. I said, "From Miss Katie Martens?"

"Yes," he replied. "Thank God, I will answer her letter tonight."

With that he leaned over the counter towards me, and prayed a very special prayer for Katie, that God would help her to make the right decision and one for me, that my business might prosper and that I would have joy in serving the Lord. With that he shook my hand and left, saying again, "I am going to write her a letter tonight. God Bless you. Goodbye, Brother Friesen."

I was surprised and overwhelmed to see how the Lord took control of the situation. Yet I kept all these burning secrets in my heart. I told no one.

The following is the letter which Rev. A. B. Peters wrote. It is translated from German.

Winnipeg, Manitoba

October 11, 1941

Dear Sister Katie:

In response to your letter, I can tell you, that I visited Brother A. Friesen, and that I know and love him too. He attended my Bible School classes and has been my student. He is a true disciple of Jesus Christ, and is occupied in the work of the Lord.

I visited him in his workshop. He is a shoemaker

by trade and has a lot of work which gives him a fair income. If the Lord should give him a helpmate, she would not be in need.

He is like Dr. Carrey, the founder of the heathen mission. He too was a shoemaker. All of us must use the gifts and talents that God has given us. Hans Sachs was also a shoemaker, and a poet as well.

Brother Friesen is a friendly, handsome looking man. He is thirty-four years old. Katie, "Tell it to the Lord," and if He gives you the permission to take Abram as your marriage partner, say, before you ask to and fro: "God willing, YES!"

With greetings of love,
Yours,

A.B. Peters.

P.S. Abram Friesen's oldest brother is a minister, and his youngest brother is a choir conductor in the North End Church.

My second letter to Katie follows:

Winnipeg, Manitoba
October 15, 1941

Dear Sister, Katie Martens:

I received your letter October 9th. Thank you kindly.

I read your letter with great joy, where you clearly stated your stand towards the Lord and towards mission. I felt as if it came out of my own heart. My prayer has always been that the Lord should give me someone that had a heart and a passion for the lost.

Deep in my heart I have always felt, that I am the Lords' and that my life belongs to Him. I also believe that the inner attitude of the heart of a couple should be the same, if they wish to have a blissful happy life together.

As far as personal work is concerned, I have worked mostly in secret up to this time. But I have tried, with God's help, to set a standard with my walk and conduct. I am also working in the City Mission Sunday School, which I enjoy very much. But I feel that the Lord expects more of me.

I must confess that I have been detained by

certain situations and circumstances in my life, or else I would have gone to heathen lands long ago. But by God's grace, it still may happen.

Sister Margarete Siemens left yesterday for South America (Columbia) to do mission work. Her heart is with the heathen. Last week we had her over for supper and she told us of her experience in mission work in Africa; how the heathen live without God, and yet have a desire to find rest for their souls. I could not resist my tears, as she talked about their hunger for God and how there is no one to show them the way.

We as Christians are much too selfish. We are only concerned about ourselves and think very little about our neighbour. God would entrust us with much more, if we would be willing to give more of ourselves to Him.

I will close for now. May the Lord be near you and bless you, as you continue in your work for the Lord.

Prayerfully, I remain:

Abe. J. Friesen

As time went on, excitement and correspondence continued, but neither was in a hurry. We both trusted God for His guidance in our lives.

The following is the second letter I received from Katie Martens.

833 Ave. C. North
Saskatoon, Sask.
October 23, 1941

Dear Brother Abram Friesen:

As a greeting I wish you God's blessing.

I received your letter dated the 15th yesterday, and I thank you!

As you can see from my address, I am presently in Saskatoon, Sask. (for an indefinite period of time) to earn some money. Miss Gertrude Huebert has said she would join me in mission work, but she is not ready yet. She is also working here in Saskatoon, and we share a room. We are both doing day work, but wages are very low. I can't say that I like it here in Saskatoon. I have been here for one week.

Gertrude thinks she will be ready to go into

Mission work in about three or four weeks. The Mission Board is waiting for my decision. Within me I feel I should not make any definite promise at this time.

I planned to go with Gertrude for four to five months. From what I have been told, we are to go to Golden Ridge, which is about 200 miles north of Saskatoon. I am thinking that it would be best and only fair if we could see each other and get acquainted. I know that I cannot express myself in a letter as I would like to. It always seems to be somewhat rigid. I would also like to give a definite answer to the Mission Board, since they are waiting for it.

Last Sunday we had Thanksgiving. Brother George Pries from Winkler, Manitoba spoke at all three services. It was a day of blessing. In the morning he spoke on Ps. 118:14-29. After noon on Romans 12:1-2. We were challenged to give ourselves completely to do the Lords will in our life. At the evening service he spoke on real happiness, according to 2 Cor. 5:1-10. We can only obtain and experience real happiness if our constant ambition is to please Him, our Lord Jesus Christ.

The congregation left with the impression, "It is truly most important in life "to please God".

This morning I read the first chapter of Jeremiah. Many truths became very important to me again.

I will close for today. Friendly greetings.

Katie Martens

Every day while I was working in my shop, my mind would be with Katie Martens. I felt that our time to meet came closer with each letter. In those days we mailed a letter with a three cent stamp and it was much faster than it is now with thirty-four cents. Mail was even delivered on Saturdays.

My third letter to Katie Martens is as follows:

853 Henderson Hwy.
Winnipeg, Manitoba
October 26, 1941

Dear Sister Katie Martens:

Greetings with Ps. 116:1-2. "I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplication. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live."

I received your letter Saturday, the 25th and I thank you. I rejoice in the fact that you are open in your letters and that you give a clear understanding as to what situation you are in at present.

You also mention that you would prefer meeting with me before you go into mission work. I am in complete agreement with you.

I would like to make an offer, if that would be convenient for you. I will send you a ticket and then you could let me know on which train you would be when you come to Winnipeg.

I would just like to know a few days in advance when I could expect you. Would you allow me to pick you up from the station and take you to my place? Or do you have a different idea about where we should meet? Please let me know. It shall be done according to your wish.

I am staying with my brother Dietrich and his wife Anne here in North Kildonan. At one time they both sang in the North End Church choir. You probably know them. At present, Dietrich is the choir conductor there. It might be best to meet at Dietrich and Anne's, but you might have a different plan.

Please let me know, and I will send you the money for the ticket.

It is midnight now.

Friendly greetings,

Abram J. Friesen

In two days she had received my letter which she answered immediately.

833 Ave. C. North
Saskatoon, Sask.
October 29, 1941

Dear Brother Friesen:

I received your letter yesterday, and I thank you for it.

I also thank you for the greeting from Ps. 116:1-

2. Last Sunday evening these same verses became very precious to me.

I also want to thank you for your friendly offer concerning the train ticket. It humbles me to accept this offer. I have always been able to pay my own fares, but this time it seems to be different.

I wrote to you last week that Gertrude Huebert and I would go into mission work together. This was our definite plan at the time.

Last Friday we listened to a missionary from South America. He also gave a slide report. It must be the same mission work which Miss Margarete Siemens joined. This man spoke personally with Miss Gertude Huebert, and she has now decided to go out under this mission. If she wants to travel with Mr. and Mrs. Parish and Margarete Siemens, she has to be ready by the end of November. So she packed her belongings on Saturday and left for home.

Whether she will really go into this mission or not, I do not know. She tried to go to Africa before, but was refused because they felt she was too old. Now she said, "It is my way from the Lord."

Next Sunday I will go to Hepburn to tell the Mission Board what has taken place lately. If they have no one to go up north with me, then I will come to Winnipeg to do day work.

I would leave Saskatoon next Tuesday, Nov. 4th, on the C.P.R. train. The train leaves at 11:45 a.m.

I also thank you for your friendly offer to receive me into your brother's home, but excuse me if I should not accept that at this time.

I have a sister who moved to Winnipeg on Sept. 15th. She lives at 600 Manitoba Ave. I would rather go to her place, because all of this is new and strange to me.

You may pick me up from the station in the morning if you wish, or if not, you could pick me up at my sister's in the evening.

I will close for now.

Remebering you in prayer,

Katie Martens

P.S. Since I have worked for the mission, I can travel for half fare.



Katte Martens and Abram Friesen - 1941

If you have taken note of the dates in our letters, you can see how quickly things developed. Thinking about it now, it seems as if the trains were going just to deliver our letters! But I am sure there were other letters too, but likely with different content!

The following is my last and swiftest letter "ever" to Katie.

853 Henderson Hwy.
Winnipeg, Manitoba
October 31, 1941

Dear Sister Martens:

Greetings with Isaiah 28:29. "This also cometh forth from the Lord of Hosts, which is wonderful in

counsel and excellent in working."

I just received your letter and thank you for the speedy answer.

Isn't it marvellous how God leads in the affairs of man?

Please, Miss Martens, make plans that seem right to you. If at all possible I will meet you at the C.P.R. station, and will accompany you to your sisters'.

My sister-in-law, Annie, invites you for supper on Wednesday. I will call on you and take you there.

Just in case something holds me back from meeting you at the station, you may phone me at 501060. Just ask for me.

I am including \$15.00 for your ticket. Use it if you can come. If you cannot come at this time, you may keep the money.

Prayerfully I remember you and also expect to see you soon.

Abram J. Friesen

Tuesday, November 4th was a very busy day for me in the shop. People came and went and I found it more difficult to smile and talk to my customers than usual. I had planned to be at the station, but with all the business, I was detained. All at once the telephone in the taylor's shop rang. Fred called me to the phone. "Wow", did I ever shake in my boots, when I heard that beautiful voice at the other end say, "Katie Martens speaking." I apologized for not being at the station to meet her, but I told her that I could come quickly and take her to her sister's house. She told me that I would not need to come since her brother-in-law and sister were coming to get her and her luggage. So I made the appointment for Wednesday evening for supper and said that I would see her tomorrow. With that short conversation, we hung up.

By then my friend Fred Letnick, the taylor, was curious. He said, "Abe, what's going on? Do you have a girlfriend? Why didn't you tell me about her?" I said, "It's all in the beginning stages. I am not sure of the outcome yet. If something good will come

of it, I'll let you know and will introduce you to her." By now it was time for supper and I left for home.

When I got home I told Dietrich and Annie that Miss Martens had arrived and that we had agreed on a supper date for Wednesday evening at their place. They were in agreement and so we planned how we would spend the evening. Annie would prepare a roast for supper. After dessert they would clean up the dishes, we would visit together a little, tuck the children into bed and then Dietrich and Annie would go next door and visit their neighbours. So the two of us could spend some time together to get acquainted.

EXCITEMENT INCREASES

If you think that November 4th was a day of excitement for me, you can imagine that November 5th was much more. I felt a mixture of excitement and nervousness. "This was the day I had been praying and waiting for!" I had the assurance that God was in control and that He had led me this way.

I went to work as usual that morning, with lunch in my pocket. I had a busy day ahead of me. Shoes had to be half-soled and heeled. Others needed to be patched. My policy was that if a customer would bring a pair of shoes that needed a half or whole sole, and rubber heels, I would shine the shoes to perfection as well. The customer appreciated that.

As I worked that day I thought and planned for the evening. Fred (the taylor) came into my shop with a garment in his hands and questioned me. He tried to give me advice, which I neither asked for or needed, but he meant well. Others came and left. I noticed that time was going quickly. My excitement increased. My adrenalin was working overtime. I noticed my heart beat was faster and my blood pressure was higher than usual. Then I wondered, "Are men the only ones who get so excited in a situation like this, or does it affect women the same way?" Well, I could only speak for myself in this case.

It was already late in the afternoon when I had finished trimming and had them ready for shining. There was very little time left in the day. Suddenly I noticed that I was doing something I had never done

before! I had polished the black shoes with brown polish and the brown shoes with black polish! This proved that I was already a bit mixed up. I quickly removed the polish and before the customer came, I had the shoes ready and shined properly.

Since Fred had a phone, I called Moore's Taxi and arranged with them that I wanted to be picked up at five p.m. from my home address. Then I quickly went home, cleaned up and waited for the taxi to arrive. At five o'clock the taxi stopped at our house. I got in and told the driver to take me to 600 Manitoba Ave. I told him that I would pick up a lady and he was then to bring us back to my address.

When he stopped at the address I had given him, I told him that I wouldn't be long because the appointment had been made.

I had never met Miss Martens' sister and brother-in-law, so I did not know what to expect. Right after my knock, the door opened and a friendly man asked me to come in. I shall never forget his look. He sized me up from top to bottom, with a smile on his face and told me that Katie Martens would be ready in a minute. As I looked around, I noticed Katie Martens, (wearing a beautiful red dress), going into the kitchen with a milk can in her hand. She was serving her sister's children supper at the table. When she saw me, she came and greeted me with a handshake and said, "I'll just put on my coat and come."

In the meantime her sister Margarete Braun came and introduced herself. She gave me a friendly smile and I had the impression that the Brauns' were kind and friendly people. They made me feel at ease at once and I felt I was accepted.

Now Katie Martens came out, wearing a maroon coat and hat and we left for the waiting taxi. I had full confidence that the driver would find his way back to where he had picked me up, but I was mistaken. As he drove along Main Street, he went past the turnoff. He must have tried to listen to what this young couple was talking about. Then all at once, Katie asked, "Is there another way to North Kildonan?" I looked, and sure enough, we were two blocks passed our turnoff. I said, "Sir, we have to cross the Redwood Bridge, and you passed it." "

"Sorry," he said, and turned around and drove

back.

This time I watched as he crossed the bridge and turned left, which was correct. Katie and I continued talking, trusting that by now he would remember where he had picked me up in North Kildonan.

Time went so quickly. The road was good and the street lights were all on when Katie asked again, "You don't live on the other side of the subway, do you?"

"No," I said, "I live on Kingsford."

She said, "We just passed through the subway."

By this time I was very embarrassed. I told the taxi driver that he was three or four blocks passed Kingsford. He apologized, turned around and turned onto Kingsford and stopped in front of my house. Now I didn't know what to think about this driver. Why had he not been able to take us back correctly?

There could be three reasons:

1. Maybe he didn't know the city and Kildonan well enough...
2. Maybe he was also in love with someone, like I was and didn't have the presence of mind...
3. He wanted to get more money from me, because the meter was running all the time.

I was also embarrassed that Miss Martens had to tell us how to find our place! But I trusted the driver! The thought came to me that if Miss Katie Martens could overlook and forgive this taxi experience and still love me and someday marry me, then surely I could trust her!

When we walked into the house, she was welcomed heartily by Dietrich and Annie. They have always been very hospitable people. Annie has always been a wonderful hostess, preparing lovely meals. Supper was ready, and we sat down to eat. Dietrich and Annie had two children; Kathy, a little more than four years old, and Walter was about two. As I mentioned earlier, whenever I was at my brothers and sisters, I always had one child on my lap during the meals. This time it was Walter's turn. He had a sore arm and so I was careful how I held and fed him. Annie was expecting her third child.

The food was very tasty and the conversation flowed easily. Since Katie Martens had lived in Winnipeg for years, she had also been a member of the

North End Church. Dietrich was the choir conductor at this time and so they had many friends and acquaintances in common. It made me feel good to see Katie so warmly received in this home. But please read on, the best is yet to come!

We all helped in cleaning up the dishes, had a little visit and soon it was time to tuck the children into bed. As soon as they were asleep, Dietrich and Annie left for the neighbours as had been planned.

Now the time had come where we were by ourselves for the first time in our lives. I had prayed and had been waiting for this moment, when we could look into each others eyes and exchange our thoughts and plans for the future. For me this was a very sacred moment, so I suggested that we kneel before the Lord and tell Him our concerns, before we engaged in conversation. When I had thanked the Lord for His wonderful leading in my life, for the many answers to prayer and for the privilege of sharing this evening with sister Martens, I closed my prayer and Miss Martens began to pray. I realized at once that she had lived a life of prayer. She thanked God that she was His child and that He had taken care of her throughout her life, especially after she had lost her parents when she was still a child. To me her prayer was heart warming. Her voice was clear and loud as she prayed.

When we sat down on the couch, we talked and since we had already exchanged our views and hearts desire with regard to our call from the Lord in the letters we had written, I felt we were ready for the most important question. I turned to her and said, "Sister Martens, do you feel in your heart that you should share your life with me in the service of the Lord?"

The answer came clearly, "Yes, I will."

Neither of us knew at the time how or where the Lord would have us serve. I was already engaged in the Winnipeg Sunday School mission work. We decided that this would be a good place to begin our service together and from there we would go as the Lord led us.

We got up onto our feet and Katie wanted to know which of us was taller. We found out that I was an inch and a half taller.

Too soon the evening had come and gone and it was

time for Katie to go back to her sisters' place. It was a clear, starry night. We walked to the street car station, and then I accompanied her to her sister's home. With a goodnight kiss, she disappeared.

"My, what a feeling!" In my heart I was rejoicing and giving praises to my God. I felt so relieved. The pressure I had had before was gone. Now I felt at ease. Walking home from the street car, I felt as if my feet barely touched the ground. I felt as if I was reborn into a world of joy and happiness.

WEDDING PLANS

We met a few more evenings that week to plan our official engagement. We were going to be announced in our church. We decided that on the following Sunday we would all go to the North Kildonan M.B. Church service, where the news would be broken to the public.

Up to this time only Dietrich and Annie knew and of course Katie's sister and brother-in-law. I invited my two brothers, John and Peter, and their wives Helena and Anna to the morning service. I also told them all that had happened. Katie called and invited her uncles from Arnaud and Manitou to share in the afternoon celebration at the Dan Brauns. We asked Rev. Abram Peters to serve with a message from God's word.

On Saturday evening we both went to see our Pastor, A. Toews, to ask him to announce our engagement in church on Sunday morning.

That Sunday Dietrich's male choir was singing. Of course I was singing in it too. Miss Katie Martens sat in the audience. One lady who knew her asked her why she had come that morning. Her answer was, "Just wait and see!"

My brother John was asked to preach. (He was always ready in case he would be asked.) So here we were in a full church. I was filled with excitement, wondering what the reaction of the people would be. In the second row to the front, I noticed the nurse who had brought me flowers a few months earlier.

Finally, when the engagement of brother Abram Friesen to sister Katie Martens was announced, many

people showed their surprise. My singing partner hit my knee with his open hand and said, "Abe, you never told me about it." I answered, "It was supposed to be a surprise and it sure was!"

I noticed friendly faces all over, except for the nurse, who looked down! After the service many people came to shake our hands and to give us best wishes.

Dietrich and Annie had invited all our relatives to their house for dinner. At three o'clock in the afternoon we all met at the Dan Braun's at 600 Manitoba Ave. for the engagement service. We sang a few hymns and Rev. A. B. Peters had a short but fitting message. Then we sang another hymn, had prayer and the service came to a close. A nice lunch had been prepared and was served.

Katie's uncles had never met me before. They were very curious to know where I came from, what I had been doing, and how my business was going. I understood their concern. They wanted to make sure that they could trust Katie to my care.

Katie's mother had died when she was only seven years old and her father died when she was twelve. She and her two sisters and one brother had been taken care of by their uncle Nick Voth, who was her mother's brother. In order for Katie and her family to come to Canada, they had been assigned to different families, that were much smaller than Uncle Nick's.

When she got to Canada at the age of fifteen, Katie had to work out, on a farm or at other places. Many hardships and difficulties were experienced in those early days in Canada. If a child had no parents or home to go to, it made these early experiences in Canada even more difficult. But uncle Nick had done his share for the Martens children. He had great concern for each of them. I'm sure he will get his reward in heaven!

When Katie was in her late teens he didn't want her to go out with boys, but when she turned twenty-five, he became concerned and wondered if she would stay single all her life. When she turned twenty-eight, he tried to help her find a man, even if he was a widower. Well, Katie had many admirers and also had several proposals, but she told me that she could not see the Lord's leading in any of them. She had always prayed, "Lord, I want the one you have chosen

for me."

Then a poor shoemaker, who had prayed much, ventured out under God's leading and asked for her hand and life's companionship. Now she could say, "This is of the Lord!"

Katie stayed at her sisters for a few more days after the engagement, and then moved to the Maria Martha Home, where she was well known.

Since I was active in the City Mission Sunday School work, under the direction of Rev. W. Falk, and was in charge of the singing, also helping out in teaching, Katie was willing and well able to help along. The City Mission Sunday School hours were from two to three-thirty. We both enjoyed this work very much, because God had given us special love for children. These children were mostly from a non-church background. Some were quite rough. Others were more kind and shy.

I was not in favor of Katie going out during the cold winter months to do daywork. She had already done that for so many years. So I suggested that we should get married and we could have a home of our own for her to keep. At first she thought it might be a little hasty, but she agreed and so we set the wedding date for December 21, 1941.

Now we made plans! First we needed to find living quarters. We found them at my dear friends, the Peter Boldt's. They had built a little store on their property in the middle 30's and had rented it out to Victor Willms. Later on they added living quarters to the back of the store. Those living quarters were available now.

I took a day off work and we bought all the necessary furniture, kitchen utensils and whatever else we needed to start out on our own. It took one evening to write down the names of relatives and friends we wanted to invite to our wedding. Official wedding invitations were ordered and were mailed. Before we realized it, the great day had arrived.

Katie had made her own wedding dress at Mrs. Albrechts, where she had taken a seamstress course some years earlier. She also expressed her wish, that she would prefer me to buy her a white Bible for the wedding, rather than a bouquet of roses. I wore a dark blue, fine striped, taylor-made suit, a white

shirt and a white bow tie.

Friends were asked to serve in the kitchen and in the dining area. They all did it with great joy.

OUR WEDDING DAY

Sunday, December 21, 1941 was a foggy, mild day, with snow on the ground. By two thirty people were streaming into the North End M.B. Church where Katie had been a member for many years. She had many friends there.

Dave Voth, Katie's first cousin from Manitou, took me in his new 1941 Dodge, to Mrs. Albrechts, where Katie was being dressed for the wedding. I had known earlier that in Katie the Lord had given me more than I deserved, but seeing her come out of the house in her white wedding dress and veil was something else! I marvelled at the beautiful gift God had given to me.

We had no flower girls. We walked slowly to the marriage altar together. The organ was playing as we walked.

Rev. Abram Toews led in the invocation. My brother John spoke in German. His text was from Proverbs 18:22 "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of the Lord." He was very practical and to the point in his application.

Rev. Abram Peters spoke on Romans 12:16 - "Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited." He spoke like a father to his children. We must say that by God's grace we have lived in harmony and also worked in harmony with people in need, for many years of our lives. When I look back now I marvel that God knew then what we would need and what we would be doing in our life ahead. "To Him be the glory." After his message, Rev. Peters performed the marriage ceremony.

Dietrich's choir sang a few songs which created a festive atmosphere at this special occasion. Rev. W. Falk, a friend and co-worker in the City Mission, served with a short message in English, and closed the celebration with prayer.

As we slowly walked out of the sanctuary, the whole congregation sang:

Jesus, still lead on till our rest be won,
And although the way be cheerless,
We will follow calm and fearless,
Guide us by Thy hand, to our Fatherland.

As we stood in the basement, the guests came and congratulated us and wished us a happy and blessed married life. After the lunch was finished, Dave Voth took us to a photographer in the city to have pictures taken.



Our wedding, December 21, 1941

After all was over and cleaned up, Katie's brother John took us to our home. Oh, what a difference! Thus far I had been alone. Now I had someone to share life with me. I took it as my most cherished and precious gift from God.

We quickly changed and left for the Kildonan Church, where the choir was having its Christmas supper, to which we had been invited. The choir presented us with a beautiful photo album as a wedding gift.

Many different people had been involved in my love affair. Before my romance started, I would never have imagined this to happen. "But God knew it right along, and made things fall into place, one by one."

BACK TO WORK AGAIN

In those years there was no such thing as a honeymoon for a young couple. A few days before our wedding Katie had come and arranged everything in our home so that it was clean and attractive. I noticed right away that she would be a good housekeeper.

Monday morning I went to work as usual, and when Katie got lonesome at home, she came and visited me in the shop. Since our courtship had been very short (only six weeks), we really didn't know each other very well. Now we had our evenings free. We could talk about our past life's experiences, our heritage, etc. On Sunday afternoons we always helped along in the Mission Sunday School.

Winter was soon over. Spring and summer came and we wondered what the future held, because the war was still raging in Europe. Would I be drafted into the army or not? We really could not make any definite plans for the future. That summer my shoe repair business flourished. I was able to do more than just make a living. I was able to save some money.

Early in the fall of 1942 I received notice that I would soon be called up for service. This shook us up, but we trusted the Lord to lead us the right way and we were willing to follow his leading, whatever the consequences.

I knew that some of my friends, and many other young men who had received their calls, were allowed to serve as conscientious objectors, either in the

bush, mines or farms. So I went to the Parliament Buildings and talked to the Government officials. I told them my situation and asked them for advise. They told me to take my medical and wait for my call.

By now I felt that things could become critical. By the end of October I received my call for the army. Once more I went to talk with the officials and offered my service in any field, except the army.

Since my medical report was excellent, they would not hear of alternative service. They said, "If you won't come and join the army, we will arrest you and put you in jail."

When I got home, I told Katie all about the conversation. We talked and prayed about the matter and with Katie's encouragement, we decided, come what may, I would not join the army, but would face the consequences.

I finished all the work in my shop and put a "CLOSED" sign in the window.

Rumors were circulating that the war could last about ten years. Since three years were up, that left seven more years. I decided to store all my machines and tools in the attic at my brother John's house and to wait for the police to pick me up. So that was what I did. Since I had closed my shoe repair shop, I was free to offer my labor to help enlarge our church in Kildonan.

MY ARREST AND JAIL SENTENCE

On December 14th I was out working at the church. When I got home for lunch, Katie told me that two policemen had been at the house to pick me up. Since I was not home, they said they would be back after lunch. I had expected something like this to happen, and so I stayed home and waited.

At two o'clock the police car drove into the yard. Two policemen came in and put the summons of arrest papers on the table. They told me they had been sent to pick me up. I asked for a few minutes to get ready. They stayed in the kitchen and Katie and I went into the living room. We both kneeled at the couch and prayed that the Lord should undertake for both of us. The policemen could see us praying. Then I kissed Katie goodbye and told them I was now ready

to go along. I sat by myself in the back seat and they drove me to the Police Station.

There I sat with a group of juveniles who had been picked up. They were a noisy bunch. After a while the police brought in a few Jehovah's Witnesses. We wondered what would be next on the policemen's agenda.

For supper we were given sandwiches and coffee. At eleven at night a bus stopped. We were handcuffed in groups of two and were taken by bus to Headingly Jail, which is about nineteen miles outside of Winnipeg.

The receptionist at the jail, (a rough man), cursed at me and said, "You conscientious objectors should all be shot." With that he sent me into the basement with a guard, where I was told to take a shower. I gave the guard my clothes and he gave me jail clothes to put on. Then I had to pick up my mattress, blanket, pillow, socks and boots and follow the guard up to the third floor. We walked through a number of locked iron gates, which the guard had to open while holding a lantern in his hand. Finally we came to a trellised gate. Behind it were three single rooms. Between each room was an iron rod wall with a little opening in the front through which to pass the food.

The only thing in my room was a cheap old iron bed with criss-cross wires as netting on which to place my mattress. I made my bed, had my prayer and lay down. All around me was darkness. Now I knew what jail was really like! That night I could not sleep for even five minutes. Every thirty minutes the guard came with a lantern to check on us.

Finally morning came. I heard someone talking to me through the trellised iron wall. He said, "What have you done to land in this place?" I told him why I was there. Then I asked him, "What is your reason for being here?" "Murder," he said. Pointing to his neighbour, he said, "both of us". After we talked for awhile, the door opened and we each got a bowl of water for washing our hands and face. Then they brought us breakfast.

Shortly after breakfast a guard came and asked me to follow him to the barber for a haircut. When I sat in the barber chair, the barber looked and looked at

me. Finally he said, "Where have I seen you before?"

"Oh," I said, "don't you know? I can tell you! I sang to you fella's here last Sunday morning in the chapel service. I sing in the male choir and we come here once a month. My brother is the conductor."

By this time he wanted to know what I had done to land in jail. I told him that I didn't want to go to war to fight. He said, "Here in jail we all know why everyone is in here."

After all the newcomers had their haircut, we were taken back to Winnipeg to go to court. The two policemen who had picked my up from home the day before walked into the courtroom with me. As we were walking away from the bus, one of them said to me, "Mr. Friesen, we hate to do this to you, but we have to." I thanked him for saying that and thought to myself, "They likely never picked up a praying criminal before."

As I entered the court room I was shocked to see so many people there. Among them were friends and relatives. After I had left things had developed very rapidly. Katie had notified Mr. C. F. Klassen and Rev. W. Falk. Mr. Klassen made arrangements with a lawyer, Abram Buhr, to defend me. C.A. DeFehr, my brothers John and Peter were there. My wife Katie and many others were there. When my name was called, Mr. Buhr asked me to take the stand at the front with him.

When the judge asked questions, the lawyer answered them for me. Then and there I was reminded of the passage in John 17, that Christ is our High Priest and that he intercedes for us. The words of Jesus in Luke 12:11 and 12 also came to me. Jesus says, "And when they bring you in to the synagogues and unto magistrates, and power, take no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say. For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say."

This time I didn't need to answer any questions. My lawyer promised that he would investigate my case. He pleaded for one week grace and arranged for me to be free on bail. So my two brothers John and Peter signed a paper for \$4,000.00 bail for one week.

When all the paper work was done, I was allowed to go home for a week. Before I left, the day and the hour of my next court appearance was announced.

During that week Katie and I committed ourselves to God again, and said we were willing to bring a sacrifice as long as we could bring honour to His Name.

That week went by very quickly. Katie and I were in court in good time on the appointed morning. As I looked around I counted over thirty conscientious objectors of different faiths and denominations. Some were very restless.

That morning none of us was freed. We were all sentenced to serve from six to twelve months in jail. The war situation in Europe at the time was very critical and they needed all the manpower they could possibly get.

Once more I kissed my dear wife goodbye as we remembered that exactly one year earlier, on December 21st, we had been married. I must give my dear wife much credit for assisting me and for encouraging me to take this step. The difference between us was that she was free and I was to be behind bars. The bus stood ready outside the courthouse to take us to Headingly Jail. My sentence was for six months with hard labour.

When we arrived in jail, we were divided into different cells. I was put in a room with thirteen men. There were two other conscientious objectors with me. All the others in the room were in jail for different reasons. Most of them were there for stealing, breaking and entering, rape, or for making homebrew. Each of us had a job to do.

Right after breakfast on the second day, a guard came to me and told me to follow him. He led me outside the jail to a pig barn and said that my job would be to look after one hundred pigs.

The barn was large. In the centre was a hall for feeding, and on each side of the hall were ten stalls with ten pigs in each stall. To the right of the entrance to the barn was a big boiler where the grain and potatoes were prepared and cooked. Two men were responsible for one barn.

My partner was a Jew. He had been in and out of jail for the last ten years because of making homebrew. We had lots of time to do our work. We sat beside the boiler for many hours talking. He told me about his past life and I told him about mine,

especially about my new life in Christ.

After we had worked together for a few weeks, he came to me and said, "Abe, what is the matter with your pigs?"

I asked, "What do you mean?"

"My pigs must be devil possessed," he said, "because I have nothing but trouble with them."

I said, "You curse and yell and swear at them. You also hit them with a fork. They are afraid of you." Then I added, "Mine are not afraid of me. I talk to them and move them around. There is respect and harmony between us. If you say your pigs are devil possessed, then mine must be converted pigs!"

You can imagine how a Jew would feel about looking after pigs. (Just read the Bible on that topic!)

My Jewish friend was called a 'Trustee', because he left the jail by himself every morning to go to the barns. I worked with him for three months, until he was discharged. When he left I was asked to take his place as Trustee.

Breakfast was served at 7:30 in the morning. My partner would leave for the barn at seven. Our breakfast consisted of porridge, dry bread and skim milk. After I had eaten, I would go to the barn and then my friend left for breakfast. A Trustee could always have his meals with the guards, where the food was much better. They had butter, cream, dessert and all you would have at home. At times he brought a few slices of bread or he snuck a few raw potatoes out of the kitchen. Then we would bake the potatoes in the fire or toast the bread. Thus we had a snack in between meals.

On Sunday morning after the chores were done we were allowed to attend chapel service. My brother Dietrich came with his choir once a month and sang to us, but we were not allowed to speak to each other.

Whenever we came in from outside, we had to put our arms up and we were searched from top to bottom. That was a regular routine.

I entered the jail on December 21, 1942 on our first wedding anniversary. Four days later, December 25th, I was handed a parcel from home. Katie had sent me some fruit and Christmas cookies. It stirred me to tears to be able to eat things my dear Katie had

handled and made. "How fortunate to have a loving and faithful wife," I thought. She proved her love and faithfulness over and over again.

Katie was allowed to visit me only once every two weeks, but she was allowed to write letters more often. (She wrote me forty-seven letters in all). I was only allowed to write to her twice amonth. All the letters that we wrote were censored in the office and were stamped with a black star of approval.

The visiting room was not very large. A uniformed guard sat on an elevated chair in one corner so he could observe everything that was going on. When Katie came to visit me, she sat on one side of an eye-level wall and I sat on the other side. We could only see each others' faces. Katie came regularly every two weeks and we exchanged news. Sometimes when she got home she would write a letter before going to bed. Yes, we were both very lonesome for each other, but we also felt the nearness of God. Many, many people let us know that they were praying for us and we could sense their prayers.

During this time Katie did some day work and a lot of sewing for others.

After I had been in jail for about two months, I can remember thinking about all those young men that I knew well who had been rejected when they had taken their medical. I had always known them to be healthy. They had never complained about any problems and now they were free and I had to serve in jail. Then I wondered why there couldn't be something wrong with me too, so that I could be free.

Day after day I dwelt on this thought until suddenly, one day I felt a little abdominal pain in my right side. At first I didn't pay much attention to it, but as the pain increased, my back also started to give me pain. I wrote Katie about my problem and wished she could give me a rub with alcohol. My pain increased so much that I had to hold my hand to my right side while walking. Suddenly the thought struck me, "Could it be that I had this pain because I had wanted pain so badly?"

"Ridiculous," I thought.

Then I said to myself, "I have no real pain." I blamed myself for it and said, "Lord, please forgive me. I want to be brave and be a testimony here in

jail. Please take this pain away."

In less than a day all my pain was gone! I had learned my lesson and thanked God for healing me.

The month of May came and with it came my release from prison. Although I had been sentenced for six months, I only needed to serve five months because of good behavior.

During my stay in jail I had learned to know and love the men in my large room. I became good friends with some of the thieves. Some evenings I put my arm around one of the prisoners and the two of us would walk up and down the room for a long time, having an intimate chat. I must say that no one ever laughed or sneered at me, because of my Bible reading or prayer. As a matter of fact, I was able to pray on my knees with some of them and also for them. God gave me great boldness to testify for Him to my Jewish friend, the guards and also to the inmates while I was in prison. I believe my time in jail was not wasted time in my life, but a time of testing and humbling before God and men. It gave me much reason to read the Bible and find comfort and strength in it.

Saturday the 22nd of May, 1943 arrived. I had my breakfast as usual. After I had eaten, the guard came in and brought me my clothes. He told me to change and to get ready for my release. How my heart leaped for joy that morning to be set free! I wondered who would pick me up since I had not been able to make any arrangements.

Then I noticed a car drive into the yard. I was told it was for me. Just before I walked through the last iron door that the guard unlocked for me, he handed me a white card and told me to read it. It said that I was to appear at the army barracks on Monday, May 24th!

That was a shock to me! As I walked out, there stood my dear wife Katie and our friends, the Peter Boldts from Kildonan. Peter had said that he wanted to pick me up. With much joy mixed with some sadness, we left for home. I had heard from others that having to report to the barracks meant having to put on a uniform and to start training. Deep within, I objected to that.

BACK IN COURT

As soon as I got home, I phoned Mr. C. F. Klassen and told him about my problem. He said that he would call A. Buhr, the lawyer, to see what he could do for me. Buhr again contacted the judge and made arrangements for me to appear in court on Monday morning, instead of reporting to the barracks.

Sunday morning we went to church and I mentioned my concern to the pastor and asked him to announce a special prayer request on my behalf for Monday morning.

Monday morning we prayed, "Lord we are in your hands. Help us to be in Your will. give me the words to say as I stand before the judge this morning."

I kissed my Katie goodbye and left on the street car. After I entered the court house I had to wait for awhile. During this time I asked the Lord to stand by me in this trying hour.

Before too long, I was asked to enter the court room. What did I see?

I saw three judges and two stenographers. They all had their eyes on me as I walked in. This arrangement was made especially for me. There was no one else there to be questioned.

The three judges took turns asking me why I refused to join the army. I told them my convictions, which I based on Scripture. Then one of them said that if I would only join, he would guarantee that I would not need to take a gun to shoot, but that I would only need to go before the army with a pair of pliers to cut the barbed wire to let the army through.

I said, "Sir, once I am out at the front, someone else will tell me what to do."

The judge could not give me such a guarantee from this office.

Our discussion lasted for about three quarters of an hour. One of the judges finally asked, "Can you milk cows?"

"Yes."

"Can you run a tractor?"

"Yes", I said. "Earlier I volunteered to go to work on a farm or in the bush or in a mine, but I was refused. There is nothing on a farm that I cannot do. I have alot of experience with farm animals and with

machinery."

Then he asked, "Would you and your wife want to work together on a farm?"

"Yes, we would!"

He walked into another room and after a short while he came back and told us that in one week we should be ready to go to Plumas, Manitoba to work on a farm. Katie would do the house work and I would work on the farm. With that he gave me my papers, stating that I qualified as a conscientious objector. I was ordered to pay \$25.00 a month from my wages to the Red Cross. I thanked them for giving me the chance to have this discussion and for granting my request. With great joy I left the court house, knowing that God had something better in store for me than killing men in war.

BACK TO FARM WORK AS A C.O.

Coming back from court and bringing home the good news caused us to thank God for answering prayer. But now we had to get ready for the work on the farm.

We found a friend who let us store our furniture in his unused attic. We packed all the clothes we would need into suitcases and cartons. Then we were ready to go. Before we left, I phoned my new boss to let him know when to expect us at the train station.

In the morning of May 31st we left Winnipeg and arrived in Plumas around noon. All the seeding had been done, except for the flax. My boss, Pudge Fletcher, lived on this farm with his old mother who was in her middle eighties. She was a very nice lady. Katie took over the cooking and all the housework and I helped seeding flax, fixing the fence and milking two cows.

When Mr. Fletcher found out that I was a handyman, he asked me whether I could renovate his house on the inside and also the outside. I told him that it would give me great pleasure to do that. So he got the material, and I started at once.

Inside I changed the stairway, ripped out the old windows and replaced them with new ones. I also built new kitchen cupboards and made several changes in other places. The boss was very pleased with my work.

Outside I put brick siding all around the house

and painted all the woodwork. I made new steps outside. When it was finished it looked like a different house.

After the harvest was finished, Mr. Fletcher married the local school teacher. When the people drove onto the yard for the wedding, they wondered whether they were at the right place or not.

We liked the work at this farm, except that Sundays were not what we had expected them to be. The Fletchers never went to church, even though he said he was an elder in the United Church.

One Sunday evening Katie and I went to his church for the evening service. There were only a few older people. The singing was poor and the message was dry. We decided not to go again.

In July we bought a 1931 Model A Ford and on several weekends we drove the 150 miles back to Winnipeg.

One Sunday we visited a Hutterite colony. We attended their morning service and they were so friendly they asked us to stay for dinner. We had a nice visit with them in the afternoon. Other Sundays we drove to Clearwater Lake or to different places for sightseeing.

BACK TO WINNIPEG IN NOVEMBER 1943

At the end of October I received a letter from the National Selective Service head office requesting me to come back to Winnipeg to work in a lumberyard.

My boss, Mr. Fletcher didn't like the idea of us leaving. He wanted us to stay with him so he could have more free time with his new wife.

For me, looking after two cows and two calves for the winter was actually a waste of time. Besides, he was married now and had a housekeeper, so we decided to obey the call and go back to Winnipeg.

We left Plumas in the beginning of November, 1943. We packed all our belongings into our car, said goodbye, wished them well, and left. When we got to Kildonan we found a comfortable place to rent at 211 Edison Ave.

After we were settled, I reported to the head office in Winnipeg. I was assigned to work at C. Hueberts Lumberyard. The lumberyard also sold coal

and cord wood. All winter I delivered lumber, cord wood and coal throughout the city of Winnipeg. Katie didn't need to go to work. She could stay at home and keep house for us.

Now we felt very much at home again. We were close to relatives and friends and of course, the church, which we had missed so much. My brother Dietrich was no longer directing the male choir, because of his involvement in other choirs and radio work. In January 1944, his singers asked me to take over the male choir. I did this reluctantly. It was my first attempt at conducting. Once I was in it, I enjoyed it. We sang at various places. Towards spring we practised for a Song Festival with the Winnipeg choirs.

In late January 1944 Katie told me that she thought she was pregnant. A visit to the doctor confirmed this. This brought great joy and excitement to us! Now Katie knew she had to prepare for the baby by making baby clothes and blankets. I made plans to make a baby crib and both of us were happy that someday we would have the most precious gift that God could give a happily married couple. It really meant alot to both of us, since we were both not young anymore. Excitement increased as time went on and we wondered what it would be. A boy? or a girl? We talked about names, color of eyes, hair, resemblances, etc. but we had to wait for the answers to all these questions.

So please read on, the best is yet to come!

A CALL FROM THE NORTH!

When we got back to Winnipeg from our farm work at Plumas, we were told that some of our Mennonite young men were serving their time as conscientious objectors as teachers and preachers in the northern Indian reserves. The Methodist Church had started a mission work among the Indians in the 1800's. Later on, the Congregationalists, the Methodists and the Presbyterians amalgamated and opened a mission station in nearly all of the Indian reserves in the north. They called themselves the "Board of Home Missions, the United Church of Canada, The Conference of Manitoba."

The representative for Manitoba was the Rev. John A. Cormie, D.D. Around the end of February 1944, Rev. H. Neufeld, the former owner and editor of the Mennonite Rundschau and other monthly papers, came to see us in our home. He told us about the need for missionaries among the Indians in the northern part of Manitoba. He gave us names of couples who had already served for a year and told us that there were still vacancies. He spoke with great concern and passion for these people and wondered whether we would consider going out to help fill the vacancy. I asked him what the work involved and where we might be needed.

He said that his children, the Jakob Toews' were serving at Poplar River and that they were going to move to Berens River after the school year ended, to take over the pastorate there. I asked him what would be expected of us. Could he tell us what our assignment would be? This was the job description:

1. Teaching school ten months of the year.
2. Conducting Sunday services.
3. Giving relief rations to the needy.
4. Caring for the sick.
5. Dispensing medicine.
6. Registering all births and deaths in the District (Protestant and Catholic).
7. Making house visitations.

I said, "This all sounds very challenging to me, but I don't qualify for this great task." He said, "I think you do."

I told him that I had no schooling in Canada. I had not graduated from a Bible School or College and had never studied medicine. I couldn't see my way through to accomplish such a great task. He asked me how much education I did have. I told him that I had six years of elementary school and one year of high school in Russia. I also told him that I had enrolled and completed a practical Christian work course from the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. He said, "I believe you qualify for the work. Let's pray about it and then you can let me know."

Before he left, we had prayer together.

Katie and I reminded ourselves that we wanted to serve the Lord. Could this be of the Lord? Going up

north to an isolated place, where we would be the only white people among the brown Indians? Besides, Katie was expecting a baby and she also had times during her pregnancy when she was overcome with fear and didn't want to be left alone. Several times I had to stay home from work and sit beside her bed, hold her hands and comfort her with the Word of God, and pray with her. These attacks would also come over her in the middle of the night.

Considering all this, we didn't know whether we should take the risk and venture out, trusting God to take care of us in such a situation. If we decided to go, would we be accepted by the Mission Board with my limited education? We would have to leave in the middle of June, 1944. The baby was due in early September. This would mean that either Katie would have to come back to Winnipeg for the delivery or else she would have to be helped and looked after by the native Indian women on the reserve.

Poplar River is about 370 miles north of Winnipeg. It is situated between the Franklin River and the Poplar River (half island). The only means of transportation is by boat in the summer and by dog-team in the winter.

After much prayer and thought, we realized that several principles needed to be considered.

1. A test: Are we still willing to be used of the Lord?
2. Did we want to choose our own place of work, or were we willing to fill the gap according to Ezekiel 22:30?
3. If accepted, were we willing to trust God for what seemed to us an impossible task?
4. Were we willing to leave relatives, friends and follow God's leading in the unknown, like Abraham of old, according to Genesis 12?

Deep in our hearts we had to say, "Yes, Lord, we are willing to go, to obey and to trust you."

In the meantime Katie went to see Dr. N. Neufeld, because we wondered whether it would be advisable for her to go north in her condition without having doctor's care. But Dr. Neufeld encouraged us to go, trusting God that things would change for the better. And they did.

Rev. H. Neufeld stopped in one day and we talked things over again. He gave me the address of the Home Missions Board in Winnipeg and asked me to write a letter to Dr. J. Cormie, conveying our desire to serve in the mission.

I wrote an extensive two page letter telling him about my background, family, conversion and my desire to serve the Lord. When he finished reading it, he said it was very good, but that it was too long and comprehensive. He suggested that I should make the letter short and to the point. So together we made up the following letter and mailed it to Dr. Cormie.

Abram J. Friesen
211 Edison Ave.,
North Kildonan, Man.

March 14, 1944.

Dr. J.A.Cormie
441 Somerset Bld.,
Winnipeg, Man.

Dear Dr. Cormie:

On your kind permission I submit my application for mission work among the Indians.

I felt the call to serve the Lord. For this purpose I attended a Bible School after the High School and also took the Correspondence Course from the Moody Bible Institute, Chicago.

For years already I have served our Churches working among the Children and the Youth. As the Lord granted me a good voice I also serve in singing.

My dear wife Katie finished the full 5 year's course of a Bible School and after served with the Western Canada Mission in Saskatchewan.

She now shares the wish to serve the Lord in the United Church Mission among the Indians with me.

We are waiting for your favorable call to the work.

Yours sincerely:



In about one week I had a letter back from Dr. Cormie which reads as follows. (see next page.)

THE BOARD OF HOME MISSIONS
The United Church of Canada
THE CONFERENCE OF MANITOBA

REV. JOHN A. CORMIE, D. D.
SUPERINTENDENT OF MISSIONS

441 SOMERSET BUILDING,
WINNIPEG, MAN.

March 17, 1944

Mr. Abram Friesen,
211 Edison Ave.,
North Kildonan,
Man.

Dear Mr. Friesen:

Your letter of March 14th is just to hand.
I am glad to know that you are thinking of our Indians and their
need of the gospel.

I am leaving for eastern Canada tonight and will
not be back until about April 5th but I spoke to Mr. Neufeld about
an Indian Reserve south of Portage la Prairie for which we are
looking for a missionary. There is a furnished house there in
which I am sure you and Mrs. Friesen will be comfortable and it is
not more than 20 or 22 miles from Portage la Prairie. I will look
forward to seeing you when I return from Toronto. In the mean-
time I would be glad if you would discuss this with Mr. Neufeld.

Yours very sincerely,

John A. Cormie

*We liked the idea going to Portage la Prairie very much,
if we would be accepted; we also discussed the matter with
Rev. H. Neufeld, but he wished, and suggested that we would
go to Poplar River instead. And in the beginning of May 1944
we received a letter that I was accepted and appointed as teacher to
Poplar River Indian Day School from the Dept. of Indian Affairs Ottawa.
the letter follows.*

THE BOARD OF HOME MISSIONS
The United Church of Canada
THE CONFERENCE OF MANITOBA

REV. JOHN A. CORMIE, D. D.
SUPERINTENDENT OF MISSIONS

441 SOMERSET BUILDING,
WINNIPEG, MAN.

April 29, 1944

Mr. Abram Friesen,
211 Edison Ave.,
North Kildonan,
Man.

Dear Mr. Friesen:


Your appointment as teacher to Poplar River Indian Day School has come through from the Department of Indian Affairs. This school runs from July 1st to April 30th and the salary allowance is at the rate of \$95. a teaching month. For your services as a missionary of the United Church you are entitled to the use of a furnished house. In addition the church will provide additional funds to bring your salary for the year ending June 30th 1945 up to \$1250. I understand there are certain bonuses but with this we have nothing to do as they come from the Department of Indian Affairs.

The Board of Home Missions will provide travelling expenses to Poplar River for yourself and wife and if you stay two years on the field will provide your travelling expenses out from Poplar River.

It will be necessary to arrange for a deduction with the Alternative Service Board which will be paid by the Department of Indian Affairs. I have no doubt you are familiar with this.

I shall be glad to have confirmation from you of your acceptance of this appointment.

Yours sincerely,



I personally went to see Dr. Cormie in his office, and told him that we were willing to go and serve at Poplar River.

By this time it was May and there were many things we needed to do to get ready to sail to our new destination in the middle of June. The first thing I did was hand in my resignation at the lumberyard and then I was able to concentrate on what needed to be done.

We made a list of things we would need up north. We were told that there was a two storey house, with furniture. We would need to bring our own bedding. We had to buy a years supply of all sorts of groceries. We needed several large barrels to pack these into. I made the baby crib and painted it white. I also made a washing machine with a wooden frame and galvanized sheet metal. This served us very well up north and can be seen today in the Steinbach Manitoba Museum. It still looks as good as new; bluish-grey in color, with a broomstick for swinging the tub.

I would also need an outboard motor for the canoe which belonged to the Mission and outboard motors were very hard to find. A new one was not available so I watched the Free Press ads. One day I found one. It was a 1 1/2 horse power Evinrude. It was second hand but in good condition. I paid \$100.00 for it. It served us very efficiently for two years. I used it to haul the rations from the Hudson's Bay Post, for visiting the Indians and for going on evening pleasure trips with the family.

One question was uppermost in my mind. That was, how and what would I teach the children in school. I had absolutely no idea. I had never been inside any school in Canada.

One Saturday I went to Eaton's in Winnipeg and there I met my friend, Jakob Wedel, who was two years older than myself. He was teaching in a public school at Osborne, Manitoba. As we sat and talked, I told him that we planned to go north to teach and preach to the Indians in Poplar River. I told him that I was concerned about the teaching aspect, since I had no schooling in Canada. He said, "Abe, you come to our home for a week with your wife. We'll give you board and room and you can be with me in school during the day. I'll give you extra instruction after school." To me this was an answer from the Lord. Now my problem was solved. When I got home I told Katie and

she agreed that we should do that.

The following Monday we boarded the train and went to the Wedels at Osborne. My friend Jakob was so good to me. He let me take care of the first and second classes after watching him for a few days. After hours he taught me the Canadian way of Arithmetic. I took note of the school books and materials he used in the class room. I made notes as he instructed and in one week I felt much more confident and at ease about the teaching job. In all this I saw God's leading in my life. "He deserves all praise!"

The following week I went to the Government bookstore in Winnipeg where school supplies were sold. I bought all the books I would need up to Grade 6. We made contact with the wholesalers for our yearly supply of groceries and packed them into barrels and were soon ready to move.

About a week before we left, an elderly couple from Steinbach came to see us. The man asked me whether I would sell him my shoerepair machines. This was also God sent, because we could certainly use the money. He paid me in cash and were both happy and benefitted from the deal.

A few days before we left, my nephew Isaak Friesen (John's second son), came to ask me whether he could come along with us to Poplar River. From the time he was a teenager he had always felt a passionate devotion to water and bush. In other words, he loved nature. With his parents consent, we were glad to take him with us. Isaak and I had many things in common and I knew we'd get along fine.

Our last Sunday in Kildonan was the annual Sunday School picnic. Katie's uncle Nick Voth and his wife had come to say goodbye to us. Before the crowd was dismissed, he addressed some farewell words to us and prayed with us that God would protect and bless us in our work.

ON OUR WAY TO POPLAR RIVER

Monday, June 11th came and the boat "Kenora" was scheduled to leave between 10 and 11 in the morning. My brother John and his wife Helena brought Isaak to our place. They, together with Dietrich and Annie and Katie's sister Margarete and Mrs. Peter Boldt all came to see us off. It gave us strange feelings to leave home and loved ones to go into the unknown, trusting God.



Standing on the Kenora with relatives and friends, ready to leave for Poplar River, Manitoba, 1944.



As we left, one more look back.

The "Kenora" was the largest boat that crossed Lake Winnipeg once a week. We had a pleasant ride. We stopped at many little stations to load cargo, cord wood, parcels, mail and also passengers. We had a comfortable cabin, a large dining room and all the comforts we needed. All went well as long as the lake was calm. But when the boat rocked because of stormy weather I became seasick. It reminded me of the time when we crossed the Atlantic coming to Canada and when I had promised myself, "Never to cross great waters unless the Lord would call me to mission work." Here I was, doing just that!



Our landing at Warren's Landing.

After travelling about 300 miles we arrived at Berens River which was one of the larger stations. Berens River had a small hospital which was run by Catholic nuns and nurses, but had no doctor. From there we went across approximately another 200 miles to Norway House which was at the end of the Lake. Here we were greeted by a multitude of native Indians. I suppose they were always anxious to see the boat come in.

We stayed at Norway House overnight and waited for the boat "Chickama" to take us to Poplar River the next day. This boat took us in the south-east

direction approximately 150 miles across the Lake into the Poplar River, which is quite wide and deep. From there it was another seven miles to our mission station.

As we passed the different native homes along the river, we could not see any life. After school in the end of May everyone had moved to Black River, eighteen miles east, for two months of commercial fishing. During these two months the Indians all lived in tents.

OUR ARRIVAL AND FIRST IMPRESSIONS!

When the "Chickama" docked at the mission station, we were greeted by Jakob and Anna Toews who had laboured in Poplar Rive for one year. Our cargo was quickly unloaded and then I helped to load their belongings, while fighting mosquitos. After everything was loaded, Mr. Toews quickly took me to the school and showed me the attendance records. books, different forms for registration of births and deaths, gave me some instructions pertaining to church services, lunch for the school children and the dispensary with all the medicine. Then they left! As the boat pulled away from the dock, Mr. J. Toews took a picture of the three of us standing next to our barrels and boxes of groceries. Oh what a feeling in a strange land! Only the three of us. I was very



We reached our destination - Poplar River.

glad that Isaak had come along. He really was a great help to us. In this we also saw God's leading in our

life. "Thanks, Ike!" We managed to bring all our boxes, beddings and groceries into the house. Katie made supper on a wood stove. We all thanked God for bringing us this far and trusted Him for the future.

Next day, after everything was put into its place in the house and all the meat and vegetables were stored away in the ice cellar which was about 120 feet away from the house, we started to explore our little island. In a way we liked what we saw, except that there was no connection with the outside world. There were no roads or cars, no telephone, no communication whatsoever. We were all on our own. All we could find on the reserve were two dogs which stayed with us. There were mosquitoes, horse flies and small black flies by the millions. The grass in the yard could not be cut, since we had no lawn mower, so that was a good breeding place for all the insects.

The mission canoe was at the river bank and Isaak and I were very anxious to try out our outboard motor on this canoe. When we first left the shore, we were somewhat fearful, but I said to myself, "I have to overcome this, because this is the only transportation I will have here." I had bought a fifty foot fishing net for \$5.00 before we left Winnipeg and so we placed the net into the river, hoping to get results. Sure enough, next morning we pulled out a few pickerels, which gave us a few meals.

Isaak felt as free as if he was in Paradise. He was away from the farm and he could explore the woods and really enjoy nature. He could go for a swim, read books (which was his favorite pass time), but he was also a big help to us.



Our mission station as seen from the approach on Poplar River.

I often went to the school building to familiarize myself with school work. I checked the work done by the students in previous years. This gave me an idea of what kind of things they had been doing. I had alot of time to get acquainted with the whole situation. All I needed was to get into the practical aspect of it.

One day an old Indian couple stopped their skiff at our dock and came to see us. The man could speak some English, and told us where he lived. He asked us whether we had any mail to send out, since he was going to Black River the next morning and offered to take mail along. Since we had none, he left.

That evening I wrote a letter and thought I might catch them at their home before they left. The next morning, after breakfast, Isaak and I went by canoe to deliver the letter. Katie stayed home and planned to make rollkuchen for lunch.

About half way to the Indian's house, we found ourselves in great danger. The Creator of this world had planted a great big rock in the middle of this river. This rock was wide at the bottom and rose about twenty-five feet above the surface of the river. Since Poplar River has a very fast flowing current, we had to steer where the waves and current were very dangerous. We shut off the motor and used our paddles. When we arrived at his house, he had already left for Black River and so we had to return, passing the same dangerous spot again. We were both very scared and shaky. All I could think about was that in case our canoe capsized we would both drown and my dear wife, Katie would be left all alone on the reserve, not knowing what had happened to us. The Lord heard my prayer again that morning and brought us home safely. Was I ever glad to see my wife once more!

Later on I passed that way many times by myself, even in stormy weather. As I got the feel of the canoe and became familiar with the water, I travelled that area with more confidence.

After we had been on the reserve for about two weeks, on a Saturday morning, a large fishing boat stopped at our dock. It carried about nine native Indians who were all wearing rain hats and black overcoats. They had come to see their new missionary

couple. As they walked into our yard, I went out to meet them and asked them to come in and sit down in the dispensary.

I didn't have enough chairs, so they sat in a circle on the floor. The tallest one introduced himself as the truant officer of the reserve. His name was Alex Douglas. He was also the spokesman for the group and spoke a fairly good English. All were dressed in black rain coats, had dark brown faces and were all starring at me.



Nine Indians came to see their new missionaries.

At first it made me feel uncomfortable, but then I reminded myself that these were the people we had come to serve. After a short conversation they asked me whether I could have a church service with them the next morning. I told them we could arrange that for ten o'clock.

As they left they asked me for some food so they could have supper and then breakfast in the morning. Since we did have some government rations in a small storehouse, I gave them what they needed. Then they walked away to their homes which were situated on our little island. I prepared a message, chose a few songs and was ready for the service.



The old schoolhouse.



The United Church.



The mission house, with Betty's diapers hanging on the line.

At 9:30 Sunday morning I rang the church bell to let them know that they could come. As they walked in they all took off their hats and sat down in the benches in the back. Before the opening prayer I announced a hymn for everyone to sing, but I could only hear myself singing. After prayer, I preached my first sermon to nine Indians. What struck me was, that as I spoke they all looked down at the floor. I wondered whether they didn't like what I was saying, or whether they did not understand. I had a very familiar text from John chapter 3 where Christ had his conference with Nicodemus regarding the new birth.

1. The necessity of regeneration (spiritual birth)
2. The condition is believing (in the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ)
3. The result is everlasting life

Before I closed I related my conversion experience to them and told them it was available for all men. I sang another hymn and closed with prayer.

Then I walked to the door, shook their hands and wished them well. They thanked me and gave me the impression that they had appreciated the service. After lunch they left for Black River.

THE LORD OPENED A WAY FOR KATIE

We had been on the reserve for more than a month and were concerned about how Katie would get back to Winnipeg for the delivery of the baby. The "Chickama" only came twice a year; (once in spring after the ice on the lake broke up and again late in fall, before freeze-up. The Chickama came to deliver food rations for the school children and for the destitutes and medical supplies for the dispensary.

School was scheduled to begin on August 1st. Some Indians had already come back from their fishing camp. At about 11 o'clock one morning a total stranger came from the south end of Poplar River, tied his boat onto our dock and came to see us in our home. He was a white man, and spoke a good English. We asked him to come in. He sat down and after we had chatted for awhile, he said that he was on his way to Berens River. I was immediately interested and asked him if he had room for a passenger. I told him that

my wife had to go to Winnipeg for the end of August. He said he had plenty of room.

Later we discussed this plan between ourselves and decided that Isaak should go with Katie to Berens River, since I didn't want Katie to go alone with a total stranger. From there they would take the "Kenora" to Winnipeg.

Katie soon had dinner ready and so we invited our guest to share dinner with us. After dinner we quickly packed things together and Katie, Isaak and the stranger left.

The Lord had given us a very sunny calm day, excellent for travelling. This man's boat did not have a cab so Katie got all the heat from the sun. Katie told me later that they had arrived in Berens River just before the "Kenora" was ready to leave. Another miracle! If they had arrived later, she would have had to wait a whole week for the next sailing. On the "Kenora", Katie had a cabin right beside the engine room, where it was very noisy and hot. This did not give her any rest or sleep, so the pursor found a bench in a sitting room where she tried to rest.

I was amazed how brave Katie was in her situation. She would have her baby and I could not even visit her in the hospital. The distance between us was 370 miles of water. "What a sacrifice, especially on her part!" In Winnipeg she stayed with her sister and brother-in-law, Dan and Margarete Braun. I knew she was in good hands with them. Isaak went back to the home farm again.

Suddenly I was a lonely man, all by myself on the Indian reserve. I had been so glad that Katie's health had improved up north and that she felt fairly strong again. My thoughts and prayers were with her day and night and how I wished I could be with her. I am sure she felt the same. God gave strength every day as we needed it.

A few days after Katie's arrival in Winnipeg, I received a radio message that she had arrived safely. This was a great comfort to me.

"So please read on, the best is yet to come!"

THE INDIANS COME HOME

If you have read my memoirs from the beginning, you will remember that I had to help my mother with the housework and cooking for four years in Russia. In Canada I had lived as a bachelor for several years. All this experience came in very handy for me during this time. I could cook, bake and keep the house tidy.

Soon the Indian families came home and with them came extra things for me to do. It was good that they did not all come at once. The first to come was Andrew Mitchell, my neighbour. He was a clean looking man. He told me that he had been the interpreter for Mr. Jakob Toews at church services, and that he would be willing to do the same for me. When I asked him what education he had, he told me that he had attended the Brandon Residential Indian Day School and had graduated with Grade 12. That scared me, since I had no education in Canada. Since he didn't ask me about my education, I never told him. No one ever questioned my education.

Soon I was deeply involved in all kind of practical work. Some people came for medication. Others were too sick to come to me, so I visited them in their homes. I had to prepare messages for Sunday morning and afternoon services. The following Monday school started. I made three meals a day for myself as well as lunch for all the school children. All these activities kept me very busy. The Federal Government supplied beans, rice, cocoa and hard biscuits for the school children. We had to cook the food for them and then serve it. I also gave them a tablespoon of cod liver oil every day.

WORKING AS A DENTIST

The month of August passed very quickly. There was so much to do that I had very little time for myself. One Saturday Steve Franklin, who was about twenty-five, came over and asked me to pull his tooth. Now that was something new to me! I had never even seen a tooth being pulled, and now I was to be a dentist.

I asked him to open his mouth so I could see

which tooth it was. He opened his mouth and I took mental note of which tooth it was. Then I told him to sit down in the chair, and I would be back shortly. I went into the living room and took out my doctor book. I looked up the section on teeth and saw the molar that troubled him. I took a good look at the root structure, which gave me a fairly good idea of what to expect. Then I knelt down and asked the Lord to help me pull it.

I rolled up my sleeves, walked into the dispensary where he was sitting, picked up the proper pliers, a small pointed knife, rubbing alcohol, cotton batten, gauze and placed all these things on a little table next to him. Then I told him that I would pull his tooth under one condition. That was that he would need to promise that he would not chew tobacco for at least one week and that he would come to see me every day after four o'clock for one week so I could check him. He promised that he would.

I disinfected all the tools, took the tiny knife and told him that I would use the knife to cut the gums around the tooth so that I could get a better grip on the tooth. I soaked up the blood with the gauze, took the pliers and fitted it nicely around his tooth. Then I tried to pull and twist, but this hurt him somuch that he suddenly pushed my hand away, slipped out of the chair and ran out. I yelled at him, ran after him and caught him by the arm. I said, "You came to have your tooth pulled. Don't be a coward. Sit down here and I'll pull it out."

He did as I told him. This time I told myself, "I won't let go of him or of the tooth until I have pulled it out." He opened his mouth wide. I put his right arm behind his back, came right close to him, grabbed the tooth all the way down to the jawbone, watched his left arm and with a twist and a pull, I had it out. He jumped up, grabbed my hand and thanked me. I got him to rinse his mouth, filled the hole with gauze and then reminded him once more of his promise to report to me every day. He came every day and I saw improvement from day to day.

The fact that I pulled teeth became known throughout the reserve. Consequently I pulled the teeth of men, women and children. The first year I didn't use any freezing, because the needles we had

were too rusty.

On my first holiday in Winnipeg, I went to see Dr. Gibbs, M.D.C.M. in Selkirk, Manitoba. He gave me a set of new needles and also the freezing solution. He showed me how to use it and how to look after the needles. This was a great help.

Since I am on the subject of pulling teeth, I'll mention two other incidents that were of special importance to me. The first was during my first winter at Poplar River. I felt a toothache coming. The pain increased during the day, but I taught school. After school, the Indians came to me with all kinds of needs and so I got to bed very late at night. This tooth was giving me sleepless nights. What could I do about it?

There was absolutely no other way but to pull it myself. So one Saturday afternoon I decided that I would go to work at it. It was one of the back molars. I could not see a cavity, but the pain was there. So I placed all the necessary tools on the table, put a mirror in front of myself, took the tiny long-handled knife, cut the gums around the tooth, and soaked up all the blood and saliva from my mouth.

Then came the moment of pulling my own tooth. The plier fit perfectly, but when I pulled and twisted, it hurt so much that I had to have a rest. I tried again, but failed. It was too painful. Now I didn't blame Steve Franklin for running away from me. Finally I said to myself, "You can't leave it as it is. The gums are cut away. You just have to be brave and do it!"

By now I was sweating, but with another try I was successful. When I looked at the roots I noticed a rotten cavity. I had done the right thing. My toothache was over and I could sleep and do my daily work.

Another experience: In February of our second winter, Jakob Bruce, our neighbour from across the river, had gone south about 100 miles to trap. All at once he was back home. He came to me and said that he had to come home because of a terrible toothache. Would I please pull his tooth?

I looked into his mouth, but couldn't see any cavity. He pointed to the tooth that he thought was giving him trouble. His teeth were very nice and

white, but were close together. I took a little hammer and tapped the tooth. He assured me that it was the one he had pointed to.

So I gave him the freezing injection and waited awhile. When his mouth was numb I went to work. He was terrific. He opened his mouth wide which gave me much freedom to work. Since his teeth were so close I had absolutely no room to turn or twist, so the tooth broke off at the jaw bone. This gave him such a bang in his head, that his pain stopped. When we examined the tooth, we couldn't find anything wrong with it.

After a few days he left to go trapping again by dog team. Within a week he was back. He told me that I had pulled the wrong tooth. The problem tooth was next to the one I had broken off.



Jakob Bruce and his dog team.

So I started all over again. First the freezing, then the cutting of the gums and after awhile I pulled the tooth like an expert. Then we agreed that if at all possible I should also take out the roots from the first tooth. I gave him another needle, and after awhile I gently took out the roots in three parts. I was thrilled to see the tallest man on the reserve behave so bravely. He never complained. Now he was free to go trapping without any further trouble or worry.

BACK TO EVERYDAY DUTIES

It didn't take long before I knew many of the people by name. It was important for me to know the school children's first and last names. I must honestly say that I learned to love those children, regardless of how they smelled or how dirty some of them looked. I could tell by the children what their home and family life was like. I went into all their homes; into some more than others, depending on their needs. Before I left the homes, I usually quoted or read a Bible verse and had prayer with them. They appreciated this every time.

There was also a Roman Catholic church on this reserve. It was situated across the large rock on the north-west side of Poplar River. The French priest who lived there led a very lonely life, because his only duties were to look after the spiritual needs of his members. I had the responsibility for the spiritual needs of the Protestants, as well as all the everyday needs of all the people. These included looking after and caring for all the sick, (Catholic and Protestant), handing out rations to those in need, sending in monthly reports on what and to whom I had given these rations. I had to register all births and deaths that occurred on the reserve and sent a monthly list to the Division of Vital Statistics. I kept a school attendance record which I mailed monthly. If there was any trouble on the reserve or if people were making homebrew, or if there was too much drinking, I was supposed to report these to the Mounted Police.



Part of the church audience.



Part of the church audience.

Beside preaching every Sunday, the United Church had also sent me a Certificate of Registration that authorized me to solemnize marriages and officiate at funerals in the Province of Manitoba. In the two years we were in Poplar River we only had one wedding, but there were many funerals for young and old.

You can see that I didn't have much time for myself. Yes, I had to learn quickly! It was much too big a load for one man, but I was young (only thirty-seven) and in good health. I had good nerves and a great heart for the poor people. The experiences I had at Poplar River were my best schooling. The Lord and the Indian people with their problems and difficulties were my professors and teachers.

When I was approached to take over this work, I could have said, "No, I don't qualify! Too much is involved. I could never do it!" But instead, I said, "With God's help we shall launch out and trust God for the rest." To His honor and glory I must say, "He has not failed us!" The Indians loved and trusted us.

Not only did I look after our mission home, and the various needs of the Indians, but I was also the caretaker of the school and the church. It was my job to keep it all clean and warm.

GOOD NEWS FROM HOME

Inspite of my busy schedule, I wrote a number of letters to Katie. It was good for me to air my feelings and also Katie was waiting for news from me. She wanted to know how I was managing. Katie kept most of my letters and still has them, except for the first three or four, which have disappeared. Of course, I also kept her letters, because they were a treasure for me. The mail was so slow that we could only send or expect mail once a month. In spring and in fall it was even slower. Our mission station was a very isolated place.

Finally, after waiting for sometime for news from home, on September 6, 1944 a clear message came over the radio. "Mrs. Katie Friesen gave birth to a baby girl. Mother and baby are doing fine!"

This had been the day I had waited for. I thought I was the only one on the reserve who heard it. The news came during the noon hour while I was having lunch. I thought I would tell no one, not even the children in school, but surprise my Sunday morning audience in church.

On September 7th I wrote a letter to Katie, my dear wife, and I am going to share it with you.

Poplar River,
Manitoba
Thurs., Sept. 7, 1944

My dearly beloved Katie and child!

Greeting with 1 Thess. 1:2 "Grace unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

I can report to you, sweetheart, that I received your message very clearly yesterday at noon. The Lord has helped you through those difficult days and hours. "Praise His Name".

You know, darling, I dreamed on Monday night that you had the baby. This excited me so much that I woke up and wondered, "could it really be true?" At noon I listened to the radio news, but there was none for me. So I thought it must have only been a dream.

But now, dear, you know we are linked together in the Spirit. God revealed it to me. Yesterday the message came through very clearly. Oh, I am so

thankful. I thought to myself that maybe no one else heard the announcement, so I wouldn't tell anyone. I planned to surprise them on Sunday morning. But it was hard for me to keep my secret from the school children.

Towards evening, Mr. Alex Bruce came for medicine and asked me whether I had heard the news from my wife at noon. I asked, "What news do you mean?"

He said, with a smile on his face, "She has a baby girl."

'Oh,' I thought, 'now my plan is spoiled.'

"Yes," I said, "I am a father now!"

This morning before school started, Andrew Mitchell came to see me and with a smile on his face, congratulated me on being a father. He said the school children had been wondering why I had not told them. Then I told him what my plan had been.

"Yes," he said, "Just about everyone knows it by now," and yet I had told no one.

Yes, news travels quickly here, even without a telephone.

Well, Katie, I hope you will soon be well and strong again. Be very careful and don't catch a cold. Do you have enough milk for the baby? Was the delivery difficult? Was the doctor with you at the time? How did you get to the hospital? Did you have too many visitors? Did you get any of my letters? (I sure hope you did!) Have you given the baby a name already?

Oh, I wish I could see you and the baby. Time will go much too slowly for me now. When and how do you plan to come back to Poplar River? Find out as soon as you can and let me know.

I thought that if you should come with the "Kenora" I probably could come to Berens River to meet you. Then I could be with you for the rest of the way. I have to know this in good time so I can get someone to take me by skiff the seventy miles to Berens River.

I would much rather have you come by plane, because if you come by boat, it will take about one week and the baby could catch a cold and it would be too much for you to look after. I would like to avoid that if possible.

For your sake, don't rush your coming. Make sure

you are well rested and strong for the trip and have a thorough check-up from your doctor.

Oh, this is such a far fetched business. I believe I should trust that you will do things just right with God's help, but you know by now what kind of person I am. I always think I ought to be everywhere. Please don't be offended by what I suggested.

Presently the weather is very good. It is actually better now than it was in August. So far we've had frost only twice.

I picked all the tomatoes, but they were still green. Soon I will dig up the potatoes. The turnips have worms, but the carrots are good. The peas are all dried up by now. My goat likes to eat the beans. She is a bad domestic animal.

I traded the two dogs for two cords of wood, so I won't have to listen to all that barking in my yard, especially at night.

Well, darling, it is eleven p.m. now and I am tired. I still have to prepare a message for Sunday. I hope the Lord will give me one. "Goodnight, darling!"

It's Sunday evening now and I want to finish this letter. I can honestly say that I enjoy my school work very much. I haven't found out whether the children notice that I am new at teaching. At least so far I have always known more and better than they. I am still the authority in school.

Mrs. Daniel Franklin seems to be improving. She is already walking around. When I visited her last Sunday, she was very friendly. It seems to me that these Indians can suffer in silence. They don't make a big fuss about pain. Maybe the reason for this is that there is so much sickness and suffering among them that they get used to it.

I haven't eaten any butter for a long time. It goes against me.

The Hudson's Bay store hasn't opened yet and the people here are short on many food articles. They come to me for almost anything and expect me to help them. There is much less canned milk on the shelf already. I am keeping a year old baby alive with the milk. There is not a single cow on the whole reserve.

The mother doesn't have enough milk for her baby. I still have three cases of powder milk, which I have not yet touched, because I am drinking goat's milk. Well, darling, I don't want to tell you all of my troubles. You will have enough of your own.

I wish you God's nearness and His blessing. Rejoice in the Lord and let's trust Him. He will do all things well.

I haven't received any mail for two weeks, but I hope to get some soon.

Best regards to all our relatives and friends.

I am your praying husband and father,

Abe Friesen

XXXXXXXXXXXXXX

PLANNING TO BRING THE FAMILY TOGETHER

I struggled through another month all by myself, from early morning until late at night. After school someone would usually be waiting for me at the door. After supper I had to prepare for the next day in school and also keep the house and school clean. Saturdays were always full of a mixture of things. On Sundays after the church services I tried to rest up a bit. However, I was often called out to see someone who was sick. All in all, I never had a dull moment.

But finally the time came when I received a letter from Katie, saying that she could not come by plane, but would come by boat (the Kenora). So I arranged for two Indians to take me to Berens River to catch the Kenora in time for Katie's last part of the trip north. One of the Indians was my neighbour, Lawrence Bruce, a Catholic and the other was the deacon of my church, William Bittern.

On Sunday morning I announced that school would be closed until I came back with my family. I gave Andrew Mitchell my house key so he could look after the house while I was gone.

On October 6th at 7 a.m. we left with a skiff and a five horse power motor. Before we left we agreed on a definite price for the trip.

It was a cloudy, chilly and stormy day. Mr. Bittern sat right in front of the keel. I sat in the

middle, well dressed and covered with blankets. Lawrence Bruce handled the motor and with a small pail emptied the water that came into the skiff.

The lake was very stormy. Suddenly at about 11 o'clock Lawrence said that we weren't getting anywhere, because the propeller wasn't working. We managed to row the skiff to shore. He fixed it, we had our lunch and then we left in the skiff again. The wind increased and the waves rose higher. I wondered if I would make it. At times the waves rose from ten to twelve feet high. If you have ever been right down by the swelling sea waves, you will know that it gives you an odd feeling. Yet I was never seasick.

My men knew how to handle the situation. The deacon in front gave directions with hand signals and Lawrence Bruce obeyed them. I gained much respect for these men on this trip.

Around four o'clock we could see the Kenora far in the distance, cutting across from Norway House to Berens River. That was the boat I was trying to catch! Even as we came closer we could not always see the Kenora because of the raging waves. After we got as far as Sand Point, which is a long arm leading into Lake Winnipeg, we had better travelling conditions.

When we entered the Berens River dock, two men from Steinbach Manitoba came to meet us. They wondered how we had survived in such stormy water. They had seen us through a telescope from the Kenora, but we had often disappeared from their sight and they thought we had drowned. But now we had landed safely. "Thank God!"

As I counted the money that we had agreed upon for this trip into Mr. Bittern's hand, he said, "A little more, a little more, a little more." So I continued giving him money until he said, "This is enough now." I didn't want to argue with him because I knew bringing me to Berens River in time to catch the Kenora had been a rough trip for them.

Now I stepped into the larger boat and settled down until we got to Winnipeg. As I got acquainted with the two men from Steinbach, I found out that they were brothers by the name Loewen. One was a business man (I think he had a lumberyard) and the other was a funeral director. They had gone north to investigate

the possibility of opening a saw mill.

I enjoyed the company of these men. They told me so much about their town Steinbach, that I thought to myself, "I sure have missed alot by not seeing Steinbach all these eighteen years that I have been in Manitoba." It is only thirty-seven miles from Winnipeg, but we didn't travel such distances in those days.

When the Kenora landed in Winnipeg I hired a taxi and headed home to see my family. What a surprise! Katie had not expected me to come all the way to Winnipeg, since I had written that I would meet her in Berens River, but she was so glad that I had come to help her with the baby and many other things that needed to be organized.

Now I saw my child for the very first time. Oh, what a thrill it was for me to take our child in my arms and press her close, to gently kiss her and to be able to say, "She is mine, all mine!"

By now Elizabeth Ann was six weeks old and oh how I had missed Katie and her. "My, what a feeling!" Now the small family was complete.

Katie had been treated as someone special at her sisters, the Brauns. They had given her the very best bed with a new mattress so she would be comfortable. There were only a few days left before we had to go back to Poplar River, but now we could plan our trip together. The following are notes that Katie made on our trip back as a family.

SHIP TRIP WITH BABY ELIZABETH ANN

On October 12, 1944 we were to leave for Poplar River on the Kenora. Daddy surprised us by arriving in Winnipeg. We expected to meet him at Berens River, but we were glad to see him in Winnipeg. The Kenora left on October 12. Little Elizabeth Anne was in her basket. Elvira Klassen, in the next cabin, was going to Norway House, so her parents were on board before we left.

The Kenora did not leave until five o'clock though. Elizabeth Ann seemed to like it. She went to sleep right away. The first day the weather was nice and calm, but the next day it was getting cold and when we got to Berens River it was cold and windy.

The doors were all open, so we were all very cold and Elizabeth Ann was restless.

A Catholic nun came on board the Kenora. So did Mr. and Mrs. Jakob Toews and Mrs. McEvans. They all looked at Elizabeth and admired her. The nun picked her up and cuddled her, and tried to stop her from crying. I feared she would catch a cold, but she did not. Only daddy and I got one.

On Saturday, about six o'clock, we arrived at Norway House. We did not know anyone there and we were told that we had to stay there and wait for a week or longer to catch the Chickama (freight boat). I was worried about where we would stay for the night. But Abe said, "The Lord will provide!", and He did in a wonderful way.

Mrs. McLeod took us into her home, gave us a nice bedroom and all the comforts we needed. We got our meals at the Residential School and also at Mrs. Jones place. Mrs. Jones made a big fuss over Elizabeth Ann; carried her and played with her and talked to her. In the school, she was fussed over by the students. There were no small children around the school, so they all wanted to see and hold her. There was Miss Thompson, Miss Hart, and Susie Neufeld from Kildonan. She let us have her room to stay in for one afternoon and so did Elvira Klassen. A young teacher by the name Toews was also there and he took Betty Ann and walked up and down the living room with her and rocked her.

On Friday, October 20, we left Norway House. The Chickama stopped on the way and stayed overnight. It was good that Elizabeth Ann had her own bed. We had to sleep on the floor of the freighter. We were glad to have Mrs. McLeods sleeping bags. We would have been very cold without them.

We landed at Warrens Landing on Saturday at noon, loaded all the freight for Poplar River and stayed there over night. Then we left early Sunday morning for the final trip home to Poplar River.

It was a very stormy day and this was the first time on this trip that Abe and I were seasick. Elizabeth Ann was a little restless, but on the whole she did very well. We were very glad to arrive, all well, at home again. The Indians were at the shore to meet us, or to see the Chickama, I don't know

which!

"Thanks, Katie for these notes!"

In August I had had a special meeting with my people on the reserve. I suggested that we should move the ration building from outside the reserve to the mission yard, so that I would not need to walk or travel by canoe all the way to hand out rations. I said that whoever would help me, would be paid with one sack of flour.

I told them the plan I had to move it and we agreed to meet on the following Saturday.

That Saturday we all went to the building where the rations were kept. We cut the roof into sections and loaded one section onto two skiffs. Then we marked all the logs (it was a log building approximately 18' x 30'), moved them and then built it up again on the mission yard. We brought the whole building over in one day.

On the following Saturday we put it together. This made it much simpler for me and also for the destitute to come and pick up their rations.

Now, arriving in Poplar River in October, the Chickama had all the supplies on board for the winter. I opened the door of the ration building and in no time at all, all flour, bacon, peas, beans, baking powder, sugar and biscuits for the school children was unloaded. Then I made sure our house was warm and so I welcomed my dear family back into our home again.

We placed Elizabeth Ann into her new crib which I had made before we had come to Poplar River the first time. Everything was different now than when I had left several weeks earlier! We thanked God that He had brought us together again as a family and we were zealous to start working and serving again.

BACK TO OUR DAILY ROUTINE

By this time Katie was strong enough to do the housework, look after Elizabeth Ann, cook lunch for the school children and also to serve the Indians while I was in school.

I noticed that the children loved singing, so I made a book of forty-five hymns and choruses that were easy to sing. I made about one hundred copies. The children helped in compiling and binding the books.

They were very eager to help.

The subjects I taught in school were Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Art, Spelling and Social Studies.

On Friday afternoons we would have singing and then we would play "Store". Two of the students would be the clerks, and all the rest were customers. I had a box of numbers which I handed out to each student. They used these numbers instead of money. When they came to the front desk to buy certain articles, they always had to check to see whether the clerk had given them the correct change. They loved to play this game.

The last hour on Fridays I made them wash their faces, necks and feet with warm water and soap, which I heated up for this purpose. Some children looked so grimy and dirty and were smelly. I wanted them to be clean for church on Sunday.

I also organized a Sunday afternoon Sunday School. Most Indians would bring their lunches along to eat in church or else to eat at their friends house. Then they came and attended the two o'clock Sunday School. During this time the whole congregation would sing out of the song books that I had compiled and hectographed for the school children.

For Christmas Eve we prepared a special program with singing, and reciting poems. Two sisters sang a duet and we had Bible stories and a short message. The church was filled to capacity. Even the priest, and the free trader came. Many positive comments were made by the parents and especially from my deacon, Miles Mitchell.

A month before Christmas I had arranged one corner in the old school house to become a workshop. Here I taught the children to make presents for their brothers and sisters for Christmas.

I had very few discipline problems in school, except when the children were too obnoxious in their behaviour toward each other. I could always sense their love and respect for me.

HEALING AND HELPING OTHERS

Number One

One evening a girl about seventeen years old came to me with a skin ulcer above her chest. It had been

open and pussing for months and she asked me if I could help her. I told her I would try, under one condition: that she would have a good wash with soap and water from top to bottom every other day, put on clean clothes and come and see me everyday after school.

The ulcer had a bad smell. I cleaned the puss out of the wound and washed it with a hydrogen peroxide solution. Then I dabbed the wound with iodine. In one month it was nicely healed.

Number Two HELPING AN 80 YEAR OLD LADY

It was late fall, 1944, our first year out. We had already had enough frost for the Franklin River to be frozen over. There had also been a little snow.

One evening, Daniel Franklin came over and told me that Mrs. Thomas Berens was very sick. She was very restless in bed and had not had a bowel movement in two weeks. This was a new problem for me to solve. What could I do for an old constipated lady? It was a real emergency.

To get to their place I had to cross the Franklin River and walk the trails through the heavy bush. I didn't feel like crossing the river since it was still very dangerous to cross the ice. But I trusted God and told Katie to pray for me.

I took my enema instruments and some soap and left in the dark. As I crossed the river, the ice frequently cracked, but I walked very slowly and made it across.

As I entered their little cabin I could see immediately that the old lady was in agony. She rolled in bed with discomfort. I told Mr. Berens to heat up some water and to bring a large pail, because she would need it.

Now, I had never seen this done to anyone, and had no idea how to do it properly, but I thought to myself, "There is always the first time, so I'll see what happens."

When the water was warm enough, I washed some soap into it, poured the water into the enema container, connected the tube, lubricated the tip with vasoline and ordered Mrs. Berens to lie down on her stomach. Then I inserted the tube and slowly let the fluid run into her colon. Mr. Berens stood next to me

and watched. When she felt uncomfortably full I stopped the flow. After awhile she said, "I need to go!" So her husband and I helped her onto the five gallon pail and she quickly relieved herself. The enema really worked. She had a thorough evacuation and felt much better.

When she was comfortable again, I prayed with them and wished them well. Then I left for home. Again I had to cross the same frozen river. If I had broken through the ice, Katie would never have seen me again. But the Lord gave grace to cross it safely as I trembled and prayed.

BABIES WITH DIARRHEA

A number of times mothers sent for me when their babies had diarrhea. For that I had a very effective remedy. I'd take a cup of pearl barley and boil it really well. Then I strained the barley and gave this slimy liquid to the baby to drink through a baby bottle. It helped every time.

Number Three

One afternoon an Indian rushed into the classroom and asked me to come across the river quickly to see Peter Bruce, a five year old boy who was dying. I did not like to leave the children alone in school, but this time I asked one boy to be responsible for the class and told the children what to do. Then I left.

As I walked into the home of Peter Bruce, I saw an awful scene. The house was full of Indians. In the center of the room was the dining room table. On it they had placed little Peter on a blanket. All his muscles and nerves were twitching from head to foot and he was shaking. The family sat around the table watching Peter. Since they were Catholic, they had asked the priest to come over. He was sitting with the family and was praying with his beads. It was really a terrifying scene. The air in the house was so stale and hot that I could hardly breathe.

The first thing I did was ask all those who were not part of the immediate family to go home. Then I took Peter's temperature. It was 106 degrees Fahrenheit. I told Mr. Bruce to heat some water and that I would run home quickly and look in my doctor book (which was already at least fifty years old, but

which had good home remedies in it), and that I would be back as soon as possible.

I found the remedy, quickly took some large towels and mustard and I was on my way to their house again. This was the remedy. "Into one gallon of nearly boiling hot water, put several tablespoons of mustard and stir. Then plunge the towel into the water, wring the towel well and wrap the towel around the child's bare skin."

This is what I did. Then I covered him with blankets and prayed for the Lord to perform the miracle. As I stood and watched, I noticed that he calmed down gradually. In three quarters of an hour he was resting peacefully. I gave orders as to what they should do next and also what he should eat and drink. Then I went back to my school.

A week later I saw Peter playing outside in the snow. He was singing "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." He had learned the chorus in my Sunday School.

Number Four

One day a Catholic man came to tell me that his three year old daughter was full of sores in her face and asked if I would come to see her. I went along with him. He lived about one and a half miles north of the mission.

When I saw his child, I must say, I had never seen anything like it. Her round face was completely covered with exzema. Her whole face was one crust, except for the eyes, lips and nostrils. The child always wanted to scratch her face. It was a pitiful sight. I told them that I would go home and bring back the necessary medication.

When I got home I took out my book and read about exzema. It gave a very simple remedy. I took plenty of gauze, olive oil and zinc ointment with me. First I warmed the olive oil and brushed it onto the whole face with a goose feather. I did this for about twenty minutes. In some places the scab softened and came off. Then I applied the zinc ointment. Next I made a mask from the gauze, cut out holes for the eyes, mouth and nose. I also covered her hands with the gauze so she could not scratch herself. Every day after school for two weeks I went down to treat this

child myself, because I could not trust her parents to do that. When I noticed her improving I skipped a day or so. I told her parents to wash her and also her clothes and also to change her clothes often.

In two months the child had new skin in her face. When she was well enough, the family came to our church one Sunday morning to show their child to others. Before they left, the mother gave me a very firm and friendly handshake and a "Thank You".

Number Five

One evening Alex Douglas came to tell me that Daniel Franklin had a swollen ear and was in great pain. He believed he had a boil deep in his ear. I first went to check it out and it looked really serious.

So I went back home and read my doctor book. It said to make a hot linseed poultice and to apply it to the sore spot. I went back, prepared the poultice in his house, wrapped it in a linen cloth, put it on the pillow and told him to lie down on his side so the ear would get all the benefit from the poultice.

First thing the next morning I went to see him. The boil had opened. All the puss had cleared out and he felt much better. So we could praise the Lord for that too.

Number Six BATHING MY SCHOOL CHILDREN

One day I found myself in school with only a dozen or so school children. I was told that the others were sick with the flu and high fevers. Again my doctor book told me what to do. This is what I did!

After school I put our large wash tub on my back and walked from house to house with it to where the children were sick in bed. I gave them each a hot bath.

I first took their temperature. Then I heated the water to the same temperature as the child's body. I poured the water into the tub. Then I placed the child into the tub in its Adam and Eve dress and began washing from top to bottom. None of the parents objected to this. Instead they helped wherever possible

When the temperature of the child was down to normal, I took the child out, dried it thoroughly,

wrapped it in a warm blanket and put it into bed. Then I told the parents to give the child lots to drink and no heavy food.

An Indian bachelor followed me from house to house and watched me bathe my students. He got a real kick out of it and made it the talk of the reserve. In a few days I had all my children back in school.

One mother told me that if her two pre-school age girls did not obey her, or if they ran outside barefoot in the snow, she would tell them, "I'll call Mr. Friesen and he'll come and give you a bath!" She said, "This way I can control them!"

Often if a mother and a baby were both sick, we would have the baby in our house and Katie would look after it while I would go and try to help the mother in her home.

One time we also looked after a sick Indian woman in our home for a week.

It is impossible for me to mention all the happenings on the reserve; the calls I made on foot, the problems I had to solve and the physical and spiritual needs I had to look after. If I should mention them all, they would fill a book by themselves. Too bad I didn't keep a record of all the work, but I had no time for that.

During our first winter we had two nine year old Indian girls living in our house for three months. One girl was Lizzie Bruce and the other was our chief's granddaughter, May Hudson. Katie made them each new dresses so they looked like twins. Each one had a doll to play with.



Lizzie Bruce and Norma Hudson.

Every evening before these girls went to bed they came to us, said their prayers and kissed us goodnight.

At first we found it difficult to get them into the bathtub, but after much persuasion they did it, and really enjoyed the bath. Afterwards they wanted to bathe more often than necessary.

All the water we used in the house had to be carried by hand up the hill from the river. Millions of small creatures were in each pail, especially in the winter. We had to pour the water through a cloth and then boil it before we could use it. This in itself was always a chore.

JOY IN HEAVEN BECAUSE ONE SINNER REPENTED

When we preach the Gospel, we should also expect results. My prayer was "Lord, let the people see the light."

One day a member of the Catholic Church came to see me. I noticed quickly that he was an intelligent man and he spoke a good English. He said, "Mr. Friesen, I have been in your church several times. I would like to have this assurance of sins forgiven that you preach about."

This was on a Saturday and so I had time to ask him to come into the house. We went upstairs to a bedroom and sat down and talked. I noticed that he was really hungry for the Gospel. I took the Bible and showed him that all men are sinners and in need of salvation.

When I had explained the different scripture passages to him, we knelt down and I prayed first. Then he also prayed, for the first time in his life. He asked Jesus to forgive his sins and asked him to come into his heart. That gave him such great joy that he was overwhelmed. He went to his priest and told him what had happened; that he was a born again believer.

From that time on he came to our church. One Sunday afternoon he gave a testimony in front of the whole congregation, young and old alike. It left a deep impression on the audience. (The two little girls who sang a duet at Christmas were his daughters.) Whenever I could, I loved to fellowship

with this man. He was the chief's nephew, Nanawam.

OUR FIRST HOLIDAY IN WINNIPEG

Finally spring breakup came in 1945. We planned our first one month holiday to Winnipeg. School lasted until the end of May. In June all the Indians planned to leave for Black River again to go fishing. We had to wait for the Chickama to bring the rations for the summer months and then we left on the Chickama to go to Berens River. From there we took the Kenora and left for Winnipeg.

We had no other place to go but to the Daniel Brauns, Katie's sister. Their door was always open to us. I felt badly that the boys had to give up their bedroom for us and sleep downstairs.

During this month of holidays, we also visited all our Voth and Friesen relatives. They all wanted to know about our first year in Poplar River. For us it was a really nice break after so many exciting experiences.

The United Church had arranged a Missions Conference at Norway House for the month of June. I left Katie and Betty Ann at the Brauns and joined the Mission Board members from Winnipeg and Toronto and the other missionaries for another trip all the way back to Norway House for the three day conference.

After we arrived at Norway House, three other young men and I got together and practised a few songs in the Cree language which we sang at the conference. The Indians loved the songs. They understood every word, but we didn't, because the Cree was translated into the Latin alphabet. I had no time to learn the native language in Poplar River, (with the exception of a few words, since my workload was too heavy. I could also get along easily without it.)

OUR LAST TRIP NORTH

In the last days of June we again did all our shopping. We bought groceries for another year and whatever else we needed. We also bought a baby carriage for Elizabeth Ann, so that we wouldn't need to hold or carry her in our arms all the time.

But the biggest question in our minds was how we

would get back to our station again. The Kenora only made her trip to Norway House and back and the Chickama came to our station only twice a year (spring and fall). The only way for us to get to Poplar River was to board a freighter which hauled fish from Black River to the St. Boniface Fish Cannery, which is in the southern part of Winnipeg. I went to the main office and made arrangements. We left in the beginning of July, 1945.

The freighter was very dirty, filthy and smelly, but it had a little cabin for passengers. The engines were fired with cord wood and the sparks, ashes and soot were flying all over. It did not take long before we felt as dirty as the boat was. We had Elizabeth Ann in the carriage and I could walk on the deck of the freighter with her.

After a few days of travel, we arrived at Black River, where we met all our Indian friends, living in their tents. They were all glad to see us again. We arrived in the morning and some of the Indians were still out fishing.

I was supposed to have a special meeting with all the Indians from Poplar River. 1945 was the year that the Children's Allowance was introduced to the Canadian families. The Department of Indian Affairs in Ottawa asked me to let the Indians know that they were also entitled to the Family Allowance.

In the late afternoon I gathered them together under the blue sky, where I told them what I thought was good news. But I found great objection. They were not willing to accept this extra money from the government. Since the war was still going on in Europe, they said that if they took this money, they would be obligated to send their young men to war. They didn't want that.

I assured them that that was not the case, and that they should think it over. I told them that when they got back home, they could come and see me and I would help them fill out the application forms. I assured them that this allowance would give them extra money for their children.

During the day Katie and Elizabeth Ann stayed at Mike Gibsens, (a white man). He was like the chief at Black River. He had an Indian wife and did whatever he pleased. He made homebrew which he sold to the

Indians so he could get part of their fishing money. He also had a grocery store where the Indians shopped. I was also told that he had the fastest motor boat on Lake Winnipeg. Even the police could not catch him!

Black River was not a pleasant place for us to stay, so I made arrangements with Mike Gibson to take us home to Poplar River.

Mike could not leave until seven o'clock that evening, after we had eaten supper. It was only an eighteen mile trip, but as we entered the lake, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, (just like Matthew 8:24), inasmuch as the boat was covered with the waves at times.

Katie sat in the front. I sat in the middle, holding Elizabeth Ann, covered with blankets, in my lap. Mike was steering with one hand and dipping out water with the other. The storm was so strong against us that it took five hours to travel those eighteen miles. We arrived at our dock at midnight all soaking wet. We were so thankful that we were home safely once more!

We wanted Mike to stay overnight, but he refused, so we gave him a bite to eat and then he left for home, in the dark stormy night.

That night we rested in our own comfortable beds again.

CLOSE TO DEATH VALLEY

By now our sweet little girl was ten months old. How we rejoiced in her and appreciated having her with us. She was very alert, had a beautiful smile and at time she would point her little finger at things as if she was going to tell us something.

A few days after we got back to Poplar River, I took her to the church, put her on the ground beside the church building and took a picture of her.

The next day we noticed that she had lost her vigor. She seemed to be weak and ran a high fever (104 degrees). Her breathing became rapid and this scared us. She would not eat and could hardly swallow any liquid. We could not figure out what was wrong. We had tried to take really good care of her. (We knew that she had been exposed to cold and wetness as the waves splashed over the skiff on our trip home

from Black River.)

We sat by her bed day and night. I found it hard to take my eyes off her. We talked quietly and prayed, "Lord, Please restore our child. Don't take her from us."

We searched our hearts and promised to bring her up in the fear of the Lord. We could not call a doctor since there was none. We were the only three on the reserve and of course, the Lord was with us, but we didn't know if He was going to take her to Himself, or if He would heal her and give her back to us. She lay pale and lifeless in the carriage, and yet at times she was restless.

At times I stood by the north window facing the Indian cemetery on a little island by itself, surrounded by the waters of the Franklin River. Here I stood, and thought, "Is that the place where we will have to take our darling Elizabeth Ann, to bury her among the native Indians?" I said, "No, Lord, please let me diagnose her illness. I'll do what I can. We will also dedicate our child to you. You have given her to us and we will give her back to you."

I walked into the dispensary, took my doctor book and read up on pneumonia, since the symptoms and temperature appeared to point in that direction. As I read up on the subject, we came to the conclusion that she must have pneumonia. I looked for the medicine that would be prescribed for pneumonia and showed it to Katie. We both read the label and decided to give her half a tablet, since a whole tablet was recommended for an adult. I put the half tablet into a spoon and crushed it into powder with another spoon. Then I put some milk into the spoon, stirred it and managed to get her to swallow it. Then we gave her a little more fluid to wash it down. After that we watched our darling baby and waited, hoping and praying for a miracle. We could see our child was seriously ill. After awhile she fell into a deep sleep for a few hours. This gave us hope for recovery.

When she awoke, she tried to open her eyes, and we said, "Thank you Lord! Please heal her completely." After a few days she let us know that she was hungry and wanted to eat and drink. As helpless parents we felt as if we had been through a time of inward storm.

But through this experience we knew that our faith in God had increased and we had been drawn closer to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

"Please read on, the best is yet to come!"



Our Elizabeth Ann at ten months, 1945.

BACK IN FULL SWING

Our daughter soon recovered her health completely and we enjoyed her to the full again. She was the sunshine in our home.

During the previous months I had prepared my school curriculum for the coming year. Gradually the Indians came back to live in their homes again. For me it meant getting back into my schedule of church, school, rations, looking after the sick and needy, being on guard for trouble that might arise on the reserve and making house visitations. Of course I liked to spend some time with my family too.

In May 1945, just before we left for our holiday

in Winnipeg, Katie told me that she was expecting. So while we were in Winnipeg we arranged that around the 20th of January an airplane would come to pick up Katie and Elizabeth Ann and take them to Winnipeg, since the baby was due in the beginning of February, 1946.

We had arranged with my nephew Isaak that after harvest, he would come back to Poplar River with the Chickama to stay with us, and he would be my cook and housekeeper while Katie was away in Winnipeg. Isaak did this gladly, and I don't know if I could have managed without him. He arrived just before freeze-up and felt quite at home in the north, since he had been there the year before. He soon learned to cook, bake bread and prepare good, tasty meals. If I needed to make an emergency call during the schoolday, I asked Isaak to attend the children while I was gone.

Regular school attendance in my first year was around twenty-five children. During the second year I had from thirty to thirty-five children in Grades One to Six. Lillian Bruce, a fourteen year old girl, had been in a residential school and had finished Grade Five, so I was glad that I had bought some Grade Six books.

Most of the children were slow learners. I had one boy, Peter, who was twelve and still in Grade Two. At least once a year I announced in church that parents were welcome to come and see what their children were actually doing in school. Some parents came. The chief and the truant officer came several times.

I never had an inspector come to visit my school or anyone else who would criticize me or give me help in different methods. Whatever I did and however I did it, was always the right way in the eyes of the natives. They knew that I had been sent by the Department of Indian Affairs in Ottawa and by the Mission Board in Winnipeg. They respected me as the man with authority. At first I felt unworthy of this great task, but as I got to know the people and their needs, and in many cases also their ignorance, I gained confidence in myself and was ready to attack any problem that was brought to my attention.

I could not get counsel or advice from anyone, but many times I told my dear wife Katie my problems

and in many cases she gave me excellent counsel and advise.

I have told my dear wife many times that without her, I could never have accomplished the work that I have been called to do in my life. She really has been a Biblical helpmeet to me throughout our married life. I have found her to be a very honest, faithful and wise person. We still agree and often talk about it, that God had his hand in our lives and in bringing us together. The longer we live, the more like one another we become in our thinking, our feelings and actions and also in our dependence on one another. God knew what he was doing when he sent her to my brother's farm in 1936, where we met for the first time.

SECOND YEAR

We had a good start the second year. As a family we were together again and could share in the work. We learned to know and love the Indian people more and had a good idea of what to expect. Yet at times things developed which we had not counted on.

Many times a man would come, bring us a nice fish, and ask for a box of cornflakes or lard. But we were not there to trade our goods. We had to see to it that our supplies would last for the length of our stay.

Christmas came. Again we had a good program and a good attendance. At midnight on New Years Eve, all those who had a shot gun went outside to shoot into the air, expressing their wishes for good luck and hope for the coming year.

NEW YEARS DAY

Just before our first Christmas, I was told by my Indian friends that they always had a community celebration on New Years Day. Everyone gathered at the log school house and brought especially prepared food along. The priest and I with my wife were also invited to attend. This was something to look forward to.

When New Years morning arrived a few men arranged the tables. The ladies came with food and set the

tables.

Most of the people had already arrived when I got there. (Katie did not want to expose our baby to this environment, so she stayed home.) Did I ever get a surprise when I walked in!

A tall, fat woman came towards me, chewing and blowing bubble gum. When she was close, she put her arm around me and gave me a big kiss. I was so shocked, I didn't know what to do. Then I saw the same thing happen to other men. They later told me that at this celebration once a year, every woman had to kiss a man. Of all the men, I had been her choice! Katie and I had a good laugh about this when I told her about it.

When everyone had arrived, we were asked to sit down to eat. I was asked to sit at the head of the table. The priest sat on my left. When everyone was seated, the chief gave a speech in the Cree language. Then the truant officer also gave a lengthy speech. They asked me to say the prayer before the meal.

The food was very different from our food, but was quite tasty. After lunch the priest was asked to make the closing prayer. While the children played outside, the adults visited for awhile. At around three o'clock we were dismissed.

"But please read on. There are better things to come."

WHEN AN INDIAN DIES

I didn't keep a record for myself, but we had many funerals. I visited and tried to help anyone, Protestant or Catholic, who was sick on the reserve, because all the medication was at my disposal. The priest visited his own members.

Whenever anyone died, the Indians called me to ring the church bell. It had to be done in a certain way, to let the people on the reserve know that someone had died.

Immediately after the death the coffin was made, decorated and the corpse was placed into it. If a Protestant had died, the family and friends came and asked for the church organ, and the hymn books to hold their "wake". Many people came to comfort the bereaved and stayed with them throughout the night.

The coffin usually remained in the house for two or three days and nights. I went to the home of the bereaved on the first evening and had a short memorial service with some singing and a short message. I pointed them to the Saviour, Jesus Christ, the one who can save, and comfort in times of sorrow and grief. After prayer I would leave for home. They would stay, sing hymns and talk until the morning, and then most of them would return to their own homes and rest. Towards evening they went back and stayed through the night again. Before the burial, they brought the organ and books back and I conducted the funeral service.

Some of my funeral messages were interpreted. (All my Sunday morning messages were interpreted.) Other funerals I conducted in English only. After the service the congregation accompanied the coffin to the cemetery. In the summer, they accompanied it to the island by skiff or canoe. In the winter we would walk across the ice.

At the cemetery I read some scripture, made some remarks and had prayer. The men would lower the coffin and with a spade would bury the dead, while all of us watched.

During my second winter I had a thirteen year old girl who was not well. I could see that her health was failing quickly. She must have had T.B. The family was Catholic, but I visited her whenever possible. Finally she died.

Three or four days past and they still hadn't buried her. So I went to their house and looked at the corpse. I noticed dark spots all over and a foul odour, so I ordered an immediate funeral, "OR ELSE!" Then there was quick action.

Some found it really hard to let go of their loved ones, and kept them in their warm homes until the time of burial.

PARTING FOR THE LAST TIME

As I mentioned earlier we had ordered a plane flight to Winnipeg for Katie and Elizabeth Ann for January 20, 1946, in time for our second child to be born. I did not like to think about parting again, but things could not be changed. We had such a happy time

with Elizabeth Ann and I knew I would miss both her and Katie immensely.

One day after the noon news, there was a message for us that the plane would come on the 21st of January. We made sure that we were ready that day, but the plane arrived late in the afternoon.



The airplane that picked up Katie and Elizabeth Ann on January 21, 1946.

The plane landed on the icy Poplar River. Two men had come to pick Katie and Elizabeth up with an old single engine freight plane. Saying goodbye was difficult, but seeing her leave in such a plane was heartbreaking.

The two men sat in front on soft seats. There was no cargo in the plane, but there was one plain plank on one side that was to be used as a bench. No provision was made to buckle up. I was very disturbed about this type of transportation.

When Katie sat down and Elizabeth Ann sat beside her mother, the door was shut and I just prayed, "Lord, go with them and bring them safely to Winnipeg." When the plane took off and reached its height, I stood there and gazed until it disappeared. With a heartache I left for the house, picked up my camera and asked Isaak to take a picture of me standing in the church door, wearing my parka.



I am standing in the church door.

The following is a letter I wrote the next day:

January 22, 1946

My dearly beloved Katie and Elizabeth Ann:

Greetings with Matthew 28:20, the last part. "Behold I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." - Yes, may God be your shelter and your refuge.

It's twenty-nine hours since I saw you last and I haven't heard any message of your arrival in Winnipeg yet. I expected good news at noon today, but there was none. Maybe you could not get in on time. I just hope you landed safely.

I felt so miserable when you left in such an old freight plane, with no proper seats for you except a wooden plank. It still makes me angry when I think of it. The least they could have done was buckle you up, but there was nothing there to protect you, except the outside walls of the plane. When you left I said, "God be with you til we meet again."

When I got back into the house, I called both of your names in the empty rooms, but there was no one to answer. I felt my heart swelling within me and then I saw the chair you had sat in before you left.

Violet came too. She seems to be quite alright again. She was especially bright and willing to answer questions. I was glad to notice that.

After Sunday School I went to see Miles Mitchell. He is still not well enough to go places. I had a wonderful time with him. He is really a nice man. Among other things he said that he would soon go home to be with his Saviour. But he is not sick enough to stay in bed.



Miles Mitchell (deacon) and Andrew Mitchell, my interpreter and their families.

From there I went to see Peter Berens little girl. The skin on her face is not smooth yet and now she had sore eyes, but the treatments I gave her seem to be bringing good results.

When I got home around six thirty, four people were waiting for me. I looked after them all and then had a bite to eat. Then I went to say good-bye to Bella at Andrew Mitchells and I visited with them.

When I got home it was nine fifteen. I told Isaak that I was going to have a rest, but just as I said it, Noah Bruce came in to get the hymn books for another wake.

Jim Bruce had come home Saturday evening. During his absence his son had died and now they wanted to

hold another wake. I told him that I was not in favor of another wake, since they had already had three of them and the body had been in the house all that time. I told him that if it had not been for me, the body would have been buried and Jim would never have seen his son again. I allowed them to keep the body in a cold place until Jim came. I told them that they should not take the body back to the house. Alex Douglas and the priests agreed to this.

I wrote all this into a letter to Jim Bruce and told him to take the body back into a cold place. I gave them no books for the wake.

After Noah was gone, a message came that Lena Franklin was very sick and that she wanted me to come and see her. So Isaak went to bed and I went out again.

I knocked at the door of the Franklin home, but no one answered, so I walked right in. Katie, the sight was awful!

John James slept on the single bed and so did Gracie. They had blankets spread on the floor where Lena slept with little Frankie and Barney. Mrs. Franklin slept on the floor at the foot of these children. (Imagine that, in the condition she is in!) (This was the lady who had kissed me on New Years Day.)

What a shock it was. Lena had her legs spread in both directions. Her mouth and eyes were wide open and her head was thrown back. She had a hard time breathing. It seemed as if her bronchial tubes were nearly closed. It seemed to me that she could pass away any time.

I told the family that she must have caught a cold and that now her tonsils were inflamed and swollen. That could choke her. I prayed with them, and told them to come get some medicine right away, which they did. That was how my Sunday came to a close. Finally, I sat down in the big chair and relaxed a bit, before going to bed.

P.S. January 29, 1946

Today the little boy was finally buried by the priest. Lillian and Nina were here this evening to tell me that they both would be in school tomorrow and they would attend school regularly.

Everyday Isaak is learning to cook a little more. Tomorrow he will do the laundry and the next day the baking. The pluma moos was a bit thick, but it tasted good. I think we are both gaining weight.

Well, sweetheart, don't loose courage. Look up. Light comes from above.

Yours as ever, Abe, Betty's and Baby's Papa!

SIX HOURS I NEVER COUNTED ON

It was a Friday evening. All was quiet in the house. Katie was in Winnipeg with Betty Ann waiting for Renetta to be born. Isaak was upstairs reading in his room and I was finally resting after a week of teaching and coping with problems that had come to my attention.

Sometimes the Indians came with good news. Other times they just came to visit.

This evening I was sitting and contemplating about the text I should use for my message for Sunday morning.

Suddenly there was a knock at the door. When I opened it I saw Alex Douglas, the truant officer (acting as police for the Indians on the reserve). He said, "Mr. Friesen, come along with me quickly to Charlie Franklins." (Charlie was the pianist in the church and was also my barber.)

I asked him, "What's going on there?"

He said, "Come and see for yourself."

Grace, Mrs. Franklin, had sent him to call for me to come at once.

When we arrived, I could hardly believe what I saw and heard. The sight was awful, and the sound terrible! Outside stood two suitcases full of all kinds of belongings. Beans were scattered all over. You could see that some kind of liquid had not only been spilled, but had been poured out onto the snow.

Inside, the house was a mess. Grace, (Mrs. Franklin), ran up and down in her house, with her baby in her arms, shouting and crying at her father the chief and at the chief's daughter Myrtle.

The chief, Mr. Nanawin, was upstairs, packing all his belongings and reaching them down to his daughter Myrtle. Together they were getting ready to leave the

house and to move into their own house.

Shortly after this, Charlie, (Mr. Franklin) walked into the house, without a cap or mittens. It was a cold February night.



Left to Right: Charlie Franklin (my barber and organist) and family; Chief Nanawin in the centre with his daughter Myrtle behind him, and Ovid Hudson and family.

When I saw what was going on, I asked everyone to sit down, since I felt I needed to do some investigating.

Charlie said, "Mr. Friesen, you might as well report this case to the Mounted Police. I will go along with Alex Douglas and the other men (who had also been in trouble) and I will serve in jail as long as I have to.

Grace, his wife, was furious. She was in a rage.

This was the problem: Ovid Hudson, Charlie's brother-in-law, and Charlie Franklin had planned to celebrate Myrtle's (the chief's youngest daughter) birthday, without Grace or Myrtle knowing about it. Charlie was going to make the homebrew. Then they planned to have the party and dance on Monday night.

Grace and her sister, Mrs. Ovid Hudson, had gone to the priest for some business and when they got back, Gracie found Charlie making this "devil's water" (as she called it). She just couldn't take it any longer, so she grabbed the broom and hit everyone in

the house with it. Gracie asked me to report this incident and to let the men who were involved in the matter suffer for it.

When we were all seated, I asked for a paper and pencil. Then I asked questions which they had to answer. I wrote down all their answers to make a record of all that had taken place. After I had filled two pages, I told them that I wished that all this could be settled without the Mounties. This could be done if each one was willing to confess his or her sins, to forgive each other, and promise never to do it again, because all this could bring nothing but grief and shame to the whole family.

Then I told them a story about a Christian woman who had a drunkard for a husband and how she had always treated him in a loving Christian way. When he had come home drunk, she had looked after him, cleaned him up and gently put him to bed so he would be comfortable. She never scolded him, but showed him love and prayed that God would show him his lost condition and that he would enter into a new life. I told them how God had honored her prayers and changed this man from a drunkard to a child of God.

Everyone was quiet and listened. When I was through with the story, I felt it had had an impact. Gracie broke down and cried. The men felt very guilty.

It took from seven o'clock that night until midnight before we were all on our knees before God. Each one called on the Lord for grace and forgiveness of their sins.

The most beautiful scene followed. Husband and wife embraced, and with tears in their eyes, asked each other's forgiveness.

We all sensed the presence of God that evening. A great calm came over everyone in the house. The chief carried all his belongings back into his upstairs room again. We felt that peace and harmony had been restored.

After midnight I was asked to go and check on another family. When I got back to the Franklin's again, I found that Gracie was very sick with a hemorrhage. By the time I had looked after her, made her comfortable in bed and was ready to go home, it was one thirty in the morning.

On Saturday, my deacon Mr. William Bittern came to see me. As we talked, I told him about my experience the night before. Then he suggested that the next day, Sunday, I should preach about the flood according to Genesis 6 and 7.

The Lord gave me a message, and heavy-hearted, I walked up the aisle to the platform. It was my most difficult message ever, but the Lord gave grace to proclaim God's standard against sin; his seriousness, but also his grace and mercy toward a confessing sinner. Yes, God pleads with the sinner even today. We read in Isaiah 1:18, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." This invitation still stands today.

After teaching the afternoon Sunday School class, and having the singing with the young and old, everyone was dismissed. I went home tired, and tried to rest for school on Monday. As I sat and meditated on what had all happened in the last few days, I just prayed that God would bless His word, so it would change the lives of those dear Indian people, who I loved so dearly.

A SURPRISE FOR KATIE

Before Katie had left for Winnipeg, I had sent a letter together with a cheque, to a flower shop in Winnipeg. I had asked that they make daily enquiries at the Concordia Hospital for Mrs. Katie Friesen, starting February 1st. If she had been admitted, they should deliver a dozen deep red roses to her. So that's what happened.

Katie was admitted on February 9th at three o'clock in the morning and the baby was born by nine o'clock in the morning. When Katie was back in her room, a nurse brought these beautiful roses to her bedside. Attached to the roses was a note saying,

"Dear Katie:

I am sending you my love with roses. May your spirit be uplifted and reminded about me every time you look at them.

God bless you, Betty Ann and the baby too.

May God's peace rest upon you, and comfort you.

Your darling,
Abe"

Believe me, this had been a pleasant surprise for Katie, as well as a mystery. She wondered how I had known about her being in the hospital and about her having the baby at that time. She found out later, when I told her all about it. Yes, love finds ways around obstacles! This was the best and the least I could do under the circumstances.

Every day during the noon hour I would listen to the radio news. Here it came. "On February 9th, 1946, Mrs. Katie Friesen, Concordia Hospital, gave birth to a baby girl. Mother and baby are doing fine."

For me this was a time of rejoicing. When I got back to school, I told the children that we had an addition to our family. Another girl. They were all happy to take the news home.

After Katie was discharged from the hospital with the baby (Renetta), she went back to her sisters, the Daniel Brauns. She stayed there for another three weeks and since there was no way for her to come back to Poplar River, she rented a small house with two rooms and a kitchen, bought some furniture and with the help of the Brauns, moved in on March 1, 1946.

She tried to manage on her own. When she wrote me all this, I felt so sorry for her. It was not easy to live a seperated and yet married life, alone with two small children, but we were willing to bring this sacrifice.

In the meantime the terrible war had come to an end. Since we had signed up with the Mission Board for only two years, our term also came to an end. However, I received several letters from the head office, asking us to stay on for at least another year, but I felt I was worn out. If they would have at least sent me help to relieve me from the duties of distributing the rations and help in caring for the ailing, then we would have considered staying on.

But it was a risky place to stay on and work. We had no connections with the outside world, especially during emergencies. Living there with two small children and no doctor or hospital would just be too much.

Dr. Cormie and Rev. H. Neufeld both wrote me and told me that they had very good reports about our work in Poplar River. My education also was sufficient to serve the Indian people; would we consider staying?

OTHER HAPPENINGS

In February our free trader, who had his store outside the reserve, left for Berens River for a few weeks. He asked Isaak to look into the store once in awhile. There were so many Indians in need of groceries however, that Isaak went down and started selling to the Indians. He even took fur in trade.

One evening Daniel Franklin came over and told me with exuberant joy that Isaak was their free trader now.

After spring breakup, around the beginning of May, Isaak left for Black River in a canoe with Bill Kissow. After a few weeks he went back to Winnipeg in a fish freighter and went home to his parents in La Salle, Manitoba.

That left me all alone again for another month with all the work, in the house and with the Indians. I had no time to waste, because there were so many needs. By now I was counting the weeks where I too would leave for home, to be reunited with my family, that I missed so much.

One Sunday evening Myrtle Nanawin, the chief's youngest daughter came over and wanted to talk to me. I asked her to come into the living room. When we were both comfortably seated, she told me that she wanted to be saved.

She knew she was not right with the Lord and now she had come to accept Christ into her heart. She asked me how she could do that. I took the Bible and gave her one too. We opened the Word of God and I showed her what God expects of us: to repent and confess our sins and put our faith and trust in Him. As we knelt in prayer, she asked Jesus to come into her heart and to cleanse her from all sin.

The peace of God and the joy that only can come by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit entered her heart and with a radiant face she exclaimed that now she too was a born again believer.

Before she left she expressed her desire to go to

Winnipeg to find a job and to go to Bible School, but she feared that with only a Grade Five education she would not qualify.

For me it was a great joy to point those to the Lord through scripture and prayer who wanted to follow Him. Some accepted Christ as their Saviour on their sick bed or on their death bed. Some came to me personally and this encouraged me alot.

There was no special remuneration for looking after all the sick and dying. It was evident that all this extra load belonged to mission work. I enjoyed it so much that I could have spent my whole life doing just that. Their needs gave me an opportunity to come into their homes and to serve them.

I have often thought of the scripture verse that Rev. A. B. Peters preached on at our wedding, from Romans 12:6 "Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits." I can honestly say that I have not found it hard to help these people. That too is of the Lord.

MY DEPARTURE FROM POPLAR RIVER

The last school day arrived and I told the children that I had appreciated their attendance and co-operation very much. I urged them not to forget the Bible stories they had been told, nor the scripture verses they had learned. I urged them to keep on singing the hymns and choruses I had taught them. They knew many of them off by heart. I also urged them to give their heart and life to Jesus Christ.

Then I took a piece of chalk and wrote in large, clear letters on the blackboard:

Ephesians 6:1-3

1. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is is right.
2. Honour your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise;
3. That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.

(And one verse for the fathers:)

4. Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

I left the school house with these words on the blackboard.

After my last Sunday morning message the congregation suggested that they should have a special farewell service in the afternoon. By two o'clock I had to quickly prepare a short farewell message. The oldest deacon, Mr. Miles Mitchell, had a message to the congregation in the Cree language. After another hymn and a closing prayer, I walked to the door in the foyer as usual, and said goodbye to all of my Indian friends. With heavy hearts we parted.

Monday I started to organize all the things I had to take back to Winnipeg with me. Some articles I gave away to children, others to adults.

When the Chickama arrived the following day, I was ready to go. Some friends helped me carry the heavy barrels to the dock. By the time the boat arrived, a crowd of Indians had come to see Myrtle Nanawin and me off. (Myrtle had permission from her father, the chief, to come along with me.)

When I arrived in Winnipeg, I phoned my friend Mr. Heinrich DeFehr. He came in a truck, onto which we loaded all the belongings. Then he took us to my family on McKay Ave. in North Kildonan.

Finally the exciting moment had come to greet my family and to look at baby Renetta for the first time. She was already four months old and I was anxious to see her. Katie had told me that she was a very quiet baby.

Elizabeth Ann acted strange toward me. She had forgotten me. But it did not take long before she took to me again and we were a happy family. The first few days I stayed at home and enjoyed my time with Katie and the girls. We had a lot of things to talk about and we needed to make plans for the future.

Myrtle was with us for only one month. One day while I was at work, her oldest sister Gracie came to take her back to Poplar River.

But please read on, the best is yet to come.

MY WORK IN 1946 - 1949

When I got back to Winnipeg, I reported to the Mission Board. Mr. Cormie tried to persuade me to go back for at least another year, because they had no

one to replace me. I told him that we could not make any promise, since I had planned that if I could earn enough money during the summer months, I would go to the M.B. Bible College. I knew I needed more education if I wanted to serve the Lord and man.

I also told him that we did not agree with the United Church's practise of child baptism. We believe in the Biblical baptism upon faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour, and on the new birth according to John 3:3 where Jesus says, "Verily, verily I say unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdon of God", and Mark 16:16 says, "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned."

How can an innocent small child have any understanding of the way of salvation? And so we differed in our convictions. But I left the office on good terms with Dr. Cormie.

I had just been home in Kildonan a few weeks when Mr. J. Enns came to see me. He told me that a year earlier he had started a mission Sunday School and now as a family, they were moving to B.C. They wondered if I would be willing to take over the Sunday School work. I said I would. So here I was, busy again every Sunday afternoon from two to three. These



Our Sunday School mission in Kildonan, Winnipeg, 1947.

children were of various nationalities; German, Russian, Japanese and others. They came from families that did not attend church. When the Enns family left, I was in charge and had two helpers the first year and more helpers in later years. Eventually this

Sunday School program became a project of the North Kildonan M.B. Church. After our time there, it developed into a church and is now a large congregation.

BECOMING A BRICKLAYER

After a few days at home, I was offered a construction job by my friend Jakob Spent. He was a builder and I was very quick to learn. I enjoyed working for him. My wage was seventy-five cents an hour.

After working for him for about a month, I had two more offers from his two brothers. The three brothers each had their own business. Jakob was a carpenter, George a plasterer and bricklayer and John was a painter. John offered me a 50-50 partnership in his business.

George had taken a contract for a brick building forty feet wide and eighty feet long, fourteen feet high. It was for a sewing factory for Mr. Goldberg (a Jew). Now he needed a bricklayer and he strongly believed that I was the man to help him. I tried my best to persuade him that I had no knowledge of bricklaying, but he wouldn't take no for an answer, since he had heard that I had built a chimney for my friend Peter Boldt, in 1931.

As the four of us were standing in a circle and the three brothers were discussing who would get me to work for him, I turned to George and said, "but I am not a bricklayer."

He said, "I'll pay you a dollar an hour."

I turned to Jakob and asked, "Will we still remain friends, even if I leave you and go work for George?"

He said, "Yes, Abe. We shall remain friends."

"Okay," I said to George, "now I am your man, but I am not a bricklayer." (But I was willing to learn).

Next morning George stopped at my house to pick me up for work. We mixed the mortar together. He told me what proportions of sand, lime and cement to use. After it was mixed, we were ready to start.

We started together at the far left corner of the building. When we had built that corner up four feet, he told me to go and start the far right corner. I

took my trowel, level, square, and mortar board and made a start. When I had built it up to about two feet, he came to check on me and found that I had done it wrong. So he tore the whole corner down and said, "We have to hurry, because the boss will soon be here."

Together we built up this corner to the same height as our first corner. Then we fastened the straight-line across both corners and filled in the wall between the two corners. I wished so much that he would show me exactly how to do it, but he did not. He believed that I was a bricklayer. The good thing was that the boss never showed up that morning.

By lunch time we had the wall built up four feet. I thought to myself, "Maybe I am not doing so badly after all."

Around two o'clock I noticed an elderly man standing on the sidewalk a distance away, watching me put on the mortar and fit the bricks. All at once he made his way over the fence, came up to me and said, "You look like an apprentice. Give me your trowel and I will show you how to do it the right way!"

"Sir," I said, "if anyone is going to show me, it will be that man," pointing to George, my boss.

So the old man left, went back to the sidewalk, and watched me again. After a few more minutes he came up to me again. This time he took the trowel out of my hand and said, "Just watch me. I'll show you how easy it really is."

He used the trowel to turn and move the mortar on the board. Then he filled the trowel and laid it so smoothly on the wall. He used the point to spread the mortar to each side and to get it ready for laying the bricks. Again he said, "Just watch me." He laid no more than twelve bricks. Then he handed back my trowel, and said, "Good Luck." He walked across the floor, climbed over the fence, took his bike and left, never even looking back.

Then George turned to me and asked, "Why did you give him your trowel?"

I said, "George, I told you yesterday, very emphatically, that I was not a bricklayer. You found that out this morning, but you did not teach me how to do it correctly. This man could see from a distance that I didn't really know what I was doing, so he came

and showed me. I am very thankful that he did. Now, let's lay bricks."

I always remained friends with George. He had a very strong faith in me. Whatever gave him this faith, I don't know. One time he told me, "Abe, you can do anything!" Thanks, brother George. You too have contributed much to my life!

When the building was half finished, George was called to do a large plastering job, so he hired another bricklayer and a helper and made me the foreman and number one bricklayer on this job. When we got as far as the construction of the big chimney, I did it all by myself. Mr. Goldberg never found out that I was a greenhorn when I started working with George.

When I finished building the chimney, he came to pay me and we had a nice chat. He encouraged me to continue bricklaying. He said, "Abe, make a name for yourself." At that time I had no idea that that would ever happen. As far as I know, eight men are in the bricklaying business today because of my friend George, who gave me the opportunity to learn the trade.

Since that first job, I have built brick houses in Winnipeg and in B.C. I have built many chimneys and fireplaces and never went to a technical school to learn the trade.

In 1948, before Christmas, I met this old gentleman again. He was leading his bike on Portage Ave. in Winnipeg. I stopped him and asked him if he remembered me. He said, "No, why should I?"

"Well," I said, "do you remember a brickbuilding going up on Juno and Williams two years ago?"

"Yes," he said.

"I am the one you came to show how to lay bricks," I told him.

"Oh," he said, "What are you doing now?"

"I have been laying bricks ever since!"

He patted me on the shoulder and said, "Good boy! Keep it up!"

POPLAR RIVER STILL ON OUR MINDS

Very often during the summer months, my thoughts went back to the people at Poplar River. I wondered

how they would manage the following year. Several times I had met Rev. H. Neufeld, and had talked about it. We came to the conclusion that if the United Church would be willing to sell this mission station to the M.B. Conference, we would be willing to go back and serve again.

So I contacted two of the head men in our conference; Rev. A. H. Unruh and Rev. A.A. Kroeker and suggested the possibility. They agreed to make this an outreach mission program, if the Poplar River Mission was available.

By this time it was late August. Dr. Cormie was ailing. He could not go to his office down town, so his secretary went to his house and did as much work as possible from his home. One evening after work I went to see Dr. Cormie. I told him why I had come and gave him my proposal. I told him that we would go back to Poplar River under one condition: that was if the M. B. Conference could purchase this mission station from the United Church.

He replied that under no circumstances would they sell the mission station. I said, "If you can't supply a missionary and teacher for Poplar River, you will loose your members. They will join the Catholic Church."

He said, "And if they all turn Catholic, we will not sell this station."

I said, "I am very sorry to hear that. That also means that we will not return to Poplar River."

As I went home on my bicycle that evening, I cried nearly all the way, because of Dr. Cormie's attitude. One month later he died.

The following winter I attended the M.B. Bible College. One evening, as I was studying in my home, there was a knock at my door. I opened it and could hardly believe who I saw. Chief Nanawin from Poplar River was standing there before me. I was shocked! I asked him to come in.

He told me that the people had sent him to come and ask us to come back to Poplar River. They had no one to care for them. He said we had served them so well. Would we come back?

I told him what I had tried to do but that our efforts had failed. Now it was impossible for us to go back, as much as we would love to. With a sad

heart, he left for home. I don't remember what kind of transportation he used for coming the 370 miles to Winnipeg.

This made us sad, but we had served our two year term, as had been originally arranged.

We still can't forget those Indian people. We often talk about them, even if some of them were like grown children. They had found a place in our hearts.

That first summer in Winnipeg I had been able to save \$300.00. My wife and I decided that I should go to Bible College for two semesters. I found it rather difficult to study, since I had not been to school for twenty-five years and I had had no education in Canada.

My classes in College were from eight in the morning until noon. In the afternoon I worked as a painter for a contractor. On Saturdays I built chimneys to earn extra money to keep my family alive. In the evenings I did as much studying as possible. I found it difficult to keep up with high school and university graduates.

When the spring semester started, I decided to go back to bricklaying. The Lord always provided a job for me. By now I had all my own tools and also had a trailer, but no car or truck to pull it.

One day I met a young man, Jake Loewen, who was looking for work. As we talked, I asked him if he would like to be my helper, mixing mortar and carrying bricks. He had a model A Ford coupe. We agreed that he would supply the car and I would allow him so much per week to take us to work and to pull my trailer with the supplies. We worked together like this all summer. (When I asked him to help me teach in the Sunday School Mission, he was also willing to do that.) Together we repaired and built chimneys, built a red brick office building for a Jew, a solid brick house, and a large furniture factory for A. A. DeFehr in North Kildonan.

While we worked on this project, I handed a trowel to Jake to work as an apprentice, and hired P.R. Toews, a college student, as helper for mixing the mortar and for carrying the bricks. P.R. Toews was attending M. B. College and was free for the summer months to earn some extra money.

That summer I also built a large two storey house

for my brother John on the farm. During that summer I earned enough money to buy a lot. The following year, with the help of a mortgage, I built a house for ourselves.

In the fall, work began to slow down and I could no longer employ Jake, so he found work with a bricklaying contractor in Winnipeg. He was granted two years of apprenticeship for the few months he had worked for me. After sometime he became the foreman on the job and now he has been in his own bricklaying business for many years. "Thanks Jake, for being so good to me."



Our house and family on Cheriton Ave., Kildonan.

In the late fall of 1947 we started building our house on Cheriton Ave. in Kildonan. My wife Katie helped me by mixing the mortar and carrying the cinder blocks (which were lighter than cement blocks) for a partial basement. When completed, the house was a nice bungalow. In the living room we had birchwood flooring. We had two bedrooms, a kitchen, bathroom without fixtures, since there was no sewer in our area. The house had electricity, running cold water and a furnace. I did all the woodwork, gyproc, jointfilling, painting and the outside stucco work. The house still looks good after all these years.

TEACHING EVENING CLASSES

After World War II, many immigrants came to

Canada. Among these were some of our relatives from mother's side, Maria and Martha Janzen. They were my first cousins. A few dozen of these immigrants settled in North Kildonan, since they had relatives and friends living there.

Since these people didn't know any English, they approached me in January 1948 to see if I would like to teach them English. I said I would love to do that if I could find a place that was large enough.

I approached our church council to see if I could use the church basement for these classes. They agreed to let me use it. Of course this was a love service to these people, with no financial gain for myself. A good number of men, women, single and married came regularly, two evenings a week. I found great satisfaction in teaching them the basics of the English language in simple terms. Since I knew both languages, German and English, I could explain things to them, which was a big help. All I taught them was Reading, Writing and Spelling.

By the time spring came, we had spent many hours of fun and learning. Some of them told me that this had been a good start for them as new Canadians. They were grateful to me for giving my time on their behalf.



Our last Sunday School picnic, 1948.



Our family, taken December 1948.

OUR MOVE TO BRITISH COLUMBIA

Katie's only brother John Martens and his wife Mary had moved to B.C. in the early spring of 1942. Her youngest sister Mary and her husband, Jack Green and family had also moved to B.C. from Toronto. Now Katie felt that we should also move to a warmer or milder climate. It was more difficult for me to make this decision since all my relatives were in Manitoba. All my connections with contractors in the building trade were also in Manitoba.

After much prayer and discussion, we finally made the decision to move. We sold our house, bought a 1937 Dodge Sedan, which was in good shape, and started out in late April, 1949. We took our time travelling, did some sightseeing along the way and arrived in Kelowna, B.C. on May 5th.

We liked what we saw: the mountains, lakes, rivers and trees. The weather was warm. We stayed at Abe Schellenbergs in Kelowna for two days. They encouraged us to settle down in Kelowna, but since the Martens and Greens had settled in the Fraser Valley, we felt we should at least see them first. We were told that once you go to the Fraser Valley you never come back to Kelowna to live. They were right.

From Kelowna, we made it to the J. Greens on Scott Rd. in one day. From here we drove around in the Fraser Valley to all the Mennonite settlements, like Yarrow, Chilliwack, Arnold, Abbotsford, Strawberry Hill and Clearbrook. In South Abbotsford and Clearbrook I had two friends, the John and Henry Sudermans, who I have mentioned earlier in my story.

Although Clearbrook was only a small community, we decided to settle down there and start a shoe repair business. We sold our car, rented a house for \$25.00 a month and a shop for an extra \$25.00 a month. We made a down payment on all the necessary repair machines and materials. Then I painted a sign, "Clearbrook Shoe Repair", put it up on the store, and was ready for business.



The Shoe Repair in Clearbrook, B.C., 1950.

Business was slow at first, but as I became known, and customers were satisfied, business started

to come in from all directions. I did work for the Air Cadets from the Abbotsford Airport and also for the Mounted Police from Mission.

In the spring of 1950 we bought a lot on Fraser Highway for \$150.00. We also bought an old office building which we moved to the front of the lot, which we used for the shoe repair business. In behind this storefront we had a house with two bedrooms, kitchen and living room.



Shoe Repair and Shoe Store on Fraser Highway in Clearbrook,
1951.

Now we were set. We were on our own and the business was flourishing. I thought I would be in the shoe repair business for the rest of my life, but things changed. Many older men came to visit me during the day. It did not bother me if they talked while I worked, because I knew my work very well. Through my shoe repair business I gained many friends.

One older gentleman visited me quite often. He was Mr. Dietrich Schulz, who was originally from Herbert Saskatchewan. He talked me into selling new shoes. He said that if someone brought in a pair of boots that were not worth fixing, I could turn around and sell him a new pair and make a few dollars profit. Repeatedly he came and told me the same thing. I told him that selling new shoes would cost alot to start off, and I didn't have that kind of money. But he offered to give me a start and said I could pay him back when I had the money.

I talked it over with Katie and we accepted his offer. First we started with men's workboots, but when people heard about that, ladies came in and wanted shoes too. Before we realized it, we not only had a shoe repair business, but now we were also selling shoes for the family.

My wife Katie was a tremendous help. She helped in finishing and polishing the shoes in the repair shop and also in serving the customers. I trained her in all types of shoes for the shoe store. Mens boots, oxfords, gore, blucher style and the balmoral style shoes. In womens shoes we sold the different styles and types of heels, like spring heel (wedge), cuban heel, military heel, etc. I took a special correspondence course from Montreal to learn about the different kinds of leather and how leather is tanned. It also dealt with how shoes are made and fitted and how shoes should be sold in retail stores.

I soon found that running two businesses was too much for the two of us. Many, many days I worked from early in the morning until late at night.

One day a man with a cane walked into our store and asked for a job. His name was George Schellenberg. He told us that he had come from Germany, had married in Vancouver and was in need of work. He also told us that he had a little experience in repairing shoes.

We invited him to stay for lunch and then decided to give him a start in Canada. Not long after that, he rented a cabin in Clearbrook and brought his wife over to join him. He caught onto the work quickly and there was plenty for both of us to do.

Once or twice a week Katie went to Vancouver by bus to purchase shoes for the store. This was always an extra load for her, since she was also doing the housework, and helping in the store. Without her I could not have managed to run the shoe repair and the shoe store.

For a few months we also employed Mrs. Schellenberg to babysit our youngest daughter, Renetta, who had an infection. The doctor gave orders to keep her in bed, whether she felt like it or not. He thought that she had rheumatic fever and so she was not allowed to exert herself. Since there was no improvement after a few months, we were advised by our

friends to take her to a childrens specialist in Vancouver. We did, and after eleven days of testing and examining her in the Children's Hospital, the doctor said that the blood test showed that there was an infection, but he believed it came from her tooth. When we came to visit her, I picked her up in my arms and she didn't want to let go of me. Then we told her that she was allowed to come home with us. For her that was the happiest day of her life. Now she could run and jump and play again, just like other children. Our worries about her were over and the family was complete again. "Thank God!"

In September the Schellenbergs approached us and asked whether we would be willing to sell the repair business to them. After considering the matter, we sold them our gold mine. They paid a certain amount down and the balance on terms, as we agreed.

Now we could concentrate on selling shoes. We bought a 1938 Chevie Sedan, in good condition. On Mondays we went to Vancouver to pick up shoes from the wholesalers.

Before long we hired a full time sales clerk, and the extra help for Saturdays. Mary Suderman, my niece, was our first full time clerk. We trained our help to be courteous, smiling and helpful to the customers. We encouraged them to give the best possible service to our customers, and they did.

OUR CHURCH INVOLVEMENT IN CLEARBROOK

We soon found ourselves quite at home in the community of Clearbrook and also in the M. B. Church. Our church leader was Rev. Jakob Doerksen and Rev. Aaron A. Toews was his assistant.

The children started Sunday School and we enjoyed all the blessing God showered on us. The church was so full that the Sunday School children had to have part of their service in another building in the church yard.

One Sunday morning I was asked to lead the young peoples class in singing. That started the ball rolling. They all enjoyed it and they really sang well.

When it came to the year end business meetings, the church insisted that I should take over the Junior

Choir which consisted of all high school students. I tried to talk my way out of it, since I had never studied music and I was scared. But the brethren insisted and finally I said that I would try it for a year.

We started in January. We always had our practise on Thursday evenings. Alma Thiessen was my first pianist and later Eleanor Braun took over. When the year was over, I was asked to continue, and by the time I resigned, I had been with the choir for four years. My work load in the church had become so heavy that I felt I could not continue with the choir.

During these four years we sang in our church as well as in other churches. Once we were asked by the Chamber of Commerce to sing at the fall fair in Clearbrook. Once a year all the Junior Choirs in the Fraser Valley got together for a Singing Festival in the MEI. This was held on a Sunday afternoon. It was always a highlight for all the young people as well as for the older folks who came to listen.

I had just started the Junior Choir when some men asked me to organize a male choir. (Mr. Henry Pauls was the instigator of this.) Soon a sizeable group of young and middle-aged men joined and we started practising. We sang in our church as well as in other churches. We brought the whole evening program in our church one Sunday night, and I gave the message. No one was ever paid for such service. Not even the church leader received any salary during those days.

In 1950, a few days before Ascencion Day, our Pastor, Jakob Doerksen asked me to bring my first message. After awhile I was asked again and gradually I was asked to share in the preaching ministry with the other brethren.

In 1952 our pastor Jakob Doerksen developed leukemia and died. Rev. Aaron Toews took over the leadership and I was asked to be his assistant. In the same year the Phillip Wiebes moved here from Manitoba and very soon we became intimate friends. He also joined us in the preaching ministry. Then Abram Konrad moved here from Alberta and he too was asked to preach.

ORDAINED TO THE MINISTRY

Our Clearbrook M.B. Church benefited greatly from the service of Rev. Aaron A. Toews. He had a small berry farm on Marshall Road in Abbotsford. Since he did not own or drive a car, he and his wife Aganetha were picked up regularly by one of our members for conducting the Wednesday Bible Study and also for the Sunday morning and evening services.

When he was asked to take over the leadership of the Clearbrook M.B. Church, he sold his farm, moved close to the church and devoted his time to church work.

I enjoyed working together with him. I had the privilege of being his helper and associate for a few years. He was like a spiritual father to me. I often thought that our relationship was like that of Paul and Timothy in the New Testament. They too were a good team. Rev. Toews was a man I could look up to. He was loving, wise, tactful and easy to listen to when he preached.

In 1953 he felt that his health was failing. He needed an eye operation and so he proposed to the church that three men, Abram Konrad, Phillip Wiebe and Abe Friesen should be ordained to the ministry. His concern was that the local church should have leadership and men responsible for the congregation. We also needed more deacons, so brother Daniel Schmidt Sr. and Jakob Isaak were nominated. The ordination of these five brethren took place in late fall, 1953. This gave the church a stronger working force. We worked in harmony under the leadership of Rev. A. A. Toews.

In the early 1950's the church agreed to have one week of evangelistic meetings. We invited Rev. P. R. Toews and missionary Rev. Henry Klassen from Vancouver to be the evangelists. Every evening we had a special singing group, either the choir or the Quartet from Vancouver that sang over the radio when Rev. Henry Klassen preached.

The meetings were very well attended. Each evening we had two speakers. One would preach in English, the other in German. The next evening they would alternate, since they were both fluent in both languages.

These meetings resulted in a great revival and an unforgettable blessing for our church. Every evening

we felt the Holy Spirit working in our midst. Married couples, and also young people came under conviction and got saved. The following summer we had our baptism outside in a creek, together with the Arnold M. B. Church. Each church had fourteen candidates. Rev. John A. Toews delivered the message (while standing on a light delivery truck). Rev. Peter Dueck from Arnold baptised the candidates from Arnold Church and I baptised the ones from our church. Fourteen of my Junior Choir members were added to the church at that occasion.

Our church was very grateful to God for this harvest of souls, and also grateful to the devoted men of God, whom God could use at this time.

During those years, I had my family and my shoe business. I was in the church council. I preached and still had the Junior Choir (which I gave up in 1954).

In the summer of 1954 Rev. A. Toews had to submit to eye surgery and with that his public service in the church came to an end. I was asked to take over the leadership until the end of 1954. At that time the church would elect a new leader and an associate.

Before the election took place, the church decided to invite Rev. Jakob Thiessen from Vancouver, to bring a few messages on the qualities and responsibilities of a church leader. The members of the church were to make it a special matter of prayer and the following Monday, the election was to take place.

Monday evening came. The meeting was opened with scripture and prayer. When the question of leadership came up, it was moved that we should vote by secret ballot. The result was that Mr. Abram Konrad and I each had the same number of votes. Now the church did not know which way to go. Mr. Konrad made the suggestion that the church should give me the leadership and he would be willing to help me. However, I could not see my way through with running my business six days a week and then taking the responsibility of church leadership as well. So I made the proposal that the church should give Abram Konrad the leadership, since he had ten years experience and was also several years my senior. Brother Phillip Wiebe took pity on me and suggested

that he would give his vote to Abram Konrad. So now Abram Konrad had the majority and became the leader. After that the church elected me to be the associate.

During these years other minister brethren moved to Clearbrook and joined our church. Some of these were my brother, Johann, from Winnipeg, Abram Goertz from Saskatchewan, Henry Born whom I had met in Headingly Jail many years earlier, David Friesen from Surrey, Jakob Friesen from Arnold, H. P. Toews from Winnipeg, John A. Harder from Yarrow, C. C. Peters came back from Paraguay and retired in Clearbrook. In 1960 Dave Neumann came to Clearbrook from Ontario and joined us brethren in the preaching ministry. By 1962 there were fourteen of us brethren who exchanged in the pulpit ministry.

The leader, Mr. A. Konrad's wages were \$50.00 per month and the associate received \$50.00 a year. During the eight years that A. Konrad was the leader, I was his associate for seven years and Phillip Wiebe was for one year. I believe the multi-ministry in the proclaiming of the gospel was a great blessing in our church since each of us had a different style and approach, which gave an interesting variety.

BUILDING CONTRACTOR AS A SIDELINE

When we launched out in selling shoes only in 1952, we never dreamed that the shoe business could be so complicated. The most difficult was to keep up with the changes in the styles of women's shoes. Also, since we wanted to serve the general public, we needed a variety of styles and sizes on the shelves, in mens, boys, womens, young girls, and childrens shoes. All this required alot of money.

A rich man can say that "Money is the least" of his worries, because he has all he needs. We too could say, "Money is the least", because we did not always have enough to pay our bills on time.

The money Mr. D. Schultz had lent us to start with had been returned to him long ago, but at the end of the month, there was always a need for more money.

One day one of our church members came to see me with a friend of his. He introduced his friend to me and then asked me whether I would build a house for this friend. The basement was to be built out of

cement blocks. He needed someone to frame the house, shingle the roof and to build the chimney. He wanted to do the rest himself.

Not only would building this be a challenge for me, but it would also bring us some extra money for operating our business, so I accepted the challenge.

Katie and the clerks continued to sell shoes and I could depend on them. Katie was very efficient.

I hired my relative, Peter Suderman, and in a few weeks the house was standing.

The news spread quickly that I could build not only houses, but chimneys also. Before long, I found myself deep in the construction business, besides running the shoe store.

One day Henry Lepp came to ask me to build a fireplace for him in a new house he was building. I told him that I had never built a fireplace before but he encouraged me to try. I bought a book on fireplace building, with different blueprints, shapes and sizes and went to work.

Peter Suderman helped me build for about two years. He was also my helper in bricklaying. In 1954 I gave him the trowel, and got him to help me lay bricks. In late fall I told him to go on his own. I gave him all my customers. I believed that he could make it. That gave me a chance to be at home again with my family, and also gave me a chance to spend more time in my business.

Peter did well in bricklaying. He raised his family and in 1970 his oldest son Walter helped him. After a few years Walter went into bricklaying on his own and after that his two younger brothers Peter and Jim followed. Some of their friends also became bricklayers and are still in business. Peter Suderman is retired now and his son Walter, is teaching school during the winter and still lays bricks during his summer holidays. This was all a result of my ten minute instruction on my first job in Winnipeg.

In the shoe store we soon had to hire extra clerks. Mary Suderman left for College in Winnipeg, so Lydia Suderman came to work for us for a few years. She was a very efficient young lady. When she left, she went into nurses training in Vancouver General Hospital. Then Betty Doerksen and Ingie Doerksen came to work for us. Others also worked part time on

Friday nights and Saturdays.

Our stock of shoes increased from \$10,000.00 to \$20,000.00 to \$35,000.00 in 1958. That was a lot of money in those years. If the business was slow, as it is in any business at times, the pressure for paying the bills by the end of thirty days brought me to my knees many times. I spread my bills out before the Lord in a solitary spot behind the shelves and said, "Lord, I have done all I could. Now you take over. Please open a door. I am stuck!"

ANSWERS TO PRAYER

Although my extra earning in construction work helped us alot, it was still not enough. We needed to go to the bank for a loan. I established good credit with the Mt. Lehman Credit Union in those years. But even then we often found it difficult to pay our bills.

One day a brother J. Falk walked into our store. He asked me if I could use extra money in my business. He said he had \$3,000.00 which he did not need. He offered to lend it to us at 6 percent interest, with the interest payments once a year and the principal payment whenever we could. If he needed the money, he would let us know in good time. Well, we could not resist this offer. To us it was "God sent", and answer to prayer.

One Saturday evening, brother Herman Lenzmann Sr. came to see us in the store. He asked us how we were making out financially. I told him that our markup was low because of the competition with stores like Eatons, Woodwards, the Bay, and other stores. I told him that with God's help we tried to make ends meet. He said that whenever we needed extra money, we should knock on his door. His daughter, Emmie, (a nurse) had extra money and she would lend us some. So when we were in need, I called and received the amount we needed.

Time and again we experienced God's provision for our needs. With God's help we always tried to make our payments on time. We never lost our credit rating with the wholesalers, banks or the private friends. To us it was very important not to loose our testimony.

A NIGHT DISTURBANCE TURNED OUT TO BE A BLESSING

I remember one night in late fall of 1956, between two and three in the morning, a Matsqui Policeman knocked on our bedroom window. He asked if he could speak with me. I quickly dressed, and half dazed, opened the door. He told me that a woman was hiding in the bush in Clearbrook (where Funks Supermarket is today). He said that several drivers had reported that a woman had come running from the bush and that she tried to be run over by these cars. He said this woman wanted to take her life, but he could not speak to her since she could not speak English. He asked me to find this woman and to talk her out of trying to commit suicide. I told him I would do my best.

Outside it was pitch dark and raining. As I left I asked Katie to pray for me. I got into my car and drove to the place he had mentioned. I parked my car beside the road and walked into the bush, carrying a flashlight in one hand, searching for the woman. As I walked in the dark I could not see anyone, so I started calling: "Is there someone in trouble?" (in German, of course) All at once I saw a person walking towards me. It was the woman the policeman had talked about. She was soaking wet and was shivering badly. I asked her why she was in the bush at that time of night. I invited her into my car to talk. She put up no resistance to getting into the car.

I asked, "Where do you live?"
"In a cabin behind the bush."

"Why are you outside in this rainy night?"

Then she told me that a year ago she and her husband, D. Wiebe had come to Canada from Mexico. They had no family and so they had both worked and saved over \$2,000.00. They put this money into the bank. With it they planned to purchase a house. Now Mrs. Wiebe had been taken to the Abbotsford Hospital for an operation. During her stay in the hospital, her husband had not come to visit her. When she was discharged, the taxi had taken her home, but she could not find her husband. The following day she had gone to the bank, and found that all their money had been taken out by her husband. Now she did not know what else to do but to commit suicide. I told her I'd take her to our home, give her a warm bed and that she could have a few hours sleep. Then we would go on from there.

When I brought her into our house, Katie gave her some dry clothes, and made up a bed for her. We talked with her for sometime, prayed together, and then committed her and also her husband into God's care. Then we went back to bed.

Next day we told her to make herself at home at our place for the time being. I went to the police and gave them all the information I had received from Mrs. Wiebe. The police then began searching for Mr. Wiebe.

Mrs. Wiebe stayed with us for about a week. Then Mrs. Anna Warkentin, a widow took pity on her and asked her to come and stay with her. In exchange for housework she would give her board and room and I suppose some extra pocket money.

More than a month passed before the police called me to come to the Matsqui Police Station to talk to Mr. D. Wiebe. He had been found in Kansas City by the U.S. police, with a woman who was also from Clearbrook. The police deported them to Canada and now he was kept in jail. To us this was another answer to prayer.

So I went to see this man who was a stranger to me. I did not know what to expect or what he looked like. When I got to the Police Station, the policeman took me to a narrow hall in which were a number of very small cubicles. Mr. Wiebe was locked up in one of these. The policeman unlocked the door

and told me to talk to him and then to report to him.

Since Mr. Wiebe could not speak English, I spoke with him in low German. He answered all of my questions.

He told me that when his wife had gone to the hospital, this woman had enticed him, and so they had eloped to the U.S. with all the money he had. Now he was back and broke. He did not want to go back to face his wife. He was ashamed.

This other woman had a real hold on him. She owned a house in Clearbrook and that's where he planned to stay. He also told me that he had worked on the railroad, but was sure that through this experience he would have lost his job.

I told him that his wife had gone through terrible agony after leaving the hospital. I told him about the experience we had with her, and where she was staying, in case he wanted to see her, but he didn't show any interest.

When the policeman came, I left, but he stayed locked up. I gave a report of my conversation with him and left for home.

As far as I can remember, he got a two month jail sentence. When he was released, he went to live with the other woman again. I talked to Mrs. Wiebe a number of times and she told me that he had never come to see her. When she realized the situation was hopeless, she moved back to Mexico to her parents.

Sometime later I met Mr. Wiebe in a restaurant. I walked up to him and said, "Dave, your wife is back in Mexico. If you ever decide to go back to her, let me know. I'll do my best to bring you two together." I knew by now that if he had any money, this other woman would get it all, because she seemed to control him for her own benefit. He had been able to get his job back with the railroad, and he had made his permanent home with this woman. But read on, the best is yet to come.

Very early one morning, (around four thirty) we heard a hard knock on our door. When I opened it, D. Wiebe stormed in, put his arms around my neck and cried. He said, "Mr. Friesen, help me go back to see my wife Katherina. I just want to get away from here."

He had nothing with him except for the clothes he

was wearing. I said, "It's too early to go to a station. Come in, lay down on the couch and after breakfast we'll pick up your belongings and I'll take you to the station."

After breakfast I drove him to this ladies house and stayed in the car, while he went into the house to pick up his belongings. But this woman wouldn't let him go. After waiting for about twenty minutes, he came to the window and beckoned with his hand, for me to leave. Then I knew he was really trapped.

The following Christmas, the Jack Greens (Katie's sister's family) were at our place for Christmas Dinner. We were not finished eating when we again heard a knock on the front door. When I opened it, D. Wiebe came in and said, "Friesen, please help me get back to my wife Katharina. I am not going back to that woman again." Again he had no extra clothes or money with him. He had escaped.

I asked him to sit down while I went to the other room and phoned Mr. A. Konrad, our church leader, and told him the story. He suggested that since we had a deacon treasury in our church, I should call Mr. Jakob Rempel, the treasurer, and he would give me a cheque to pay for Mr. Wiebe's trip to Mexico. If he could ever pay it back, that was fine. If not, at least we had helped a poor man who was in need.

I phoned Jakob Rempel and he was willing to give me the money, so I picked up the cheque. My brother-in-law, Jack Green, said he would like to come along, so the three of us rushed to the Bellingham Bus Depot. I bought the ticket for him (a non-transferrable one), and since the bus was not ready to leave, I paid for his supper in the cafeteria, gave him some pocket money for meals on the trip and waited until he was in the bus and had gone.

As we drove home, Jack and I talked about the whole episode. Jack was astonished when I told him about my experience with that couple. Now I only hoped and prayed that they would get back together again.

About one month later I received a letter from Mrs. Katherina Wiebe's father, from Mexico. He was the "Ohm" leader in their church. He told me that Dave had come home. He said that both Dave and Katherina had come before the church, had made their

confessions, were forgiven by the church and now lived together again in their previous home.

The money order for the trip was also included in this letter, with a special thank you note. Since that time, I have talked to people who have been to Mexico and who knew the Wiebes. They told us that they were farming together in Mexico again. This proves that, with God, nothing is impossible.

That closes this exciting chapter.

A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE WITH A TOTAL STRANGER

One day I received a phone call from a total stranger. He introduced himself as Peter Knight and asked whether he could see me. I told him to come at seven that evening. We were not finished eating when he walked in, an hour earlier than we had arranged.

I asked him to come in and sit down and that I would soon be ready for him. When I got back to the table, my family asked me who he was and what he wanted. I said, "I only know his name, but I have no idea what he needs."

When I was finished eating, I asked him to come into the living room with me. Then I asked what I could do for him.

He told me his story: He said that as a fourteen year old, he had run away from home and had found a job. He had become an electrician and was presently the electrical inspector for the Abbotsford-Matsqui District. He said he was an atheist, but that recently he had met a young lady who belonged to our church. He said he would like to marry her, but she had told him that unless he became a born again believer, she would not marry him. He had been told to come see me. If I could convince him that there really is a God and there is such a thing as a born again Christian, then he would want to become one too.

Well, I had never been approached by anyone like this before. I had helped a number of people find the Lord, but these were people who were longing for peace in their hearts. But now, to convince or prove to a man that there is a God, was something different.

I had grown up in a Christian home and never had this difficulty. I was taught that the Bible was

God's word to man and had never really doubted the existence of God and that he was the creator of the world. I also knew that if I wanted to become a child of God, I would need a personal encounter with Jesus Christ.

As I listened to him, I prayed in my heart for words of wisdom. I also prayed that God should open his mind and heart to the truth and to the Holy Spirit and give me the words to say that would make sense to him.

I told him that I had no problem with the existence of God. I could see God everywhere in creation: in the sky, clouds, stars, moon, sun, seas, rivers, oceans, mountains; the different kinds of trees, flowers, vegetables, etc. All that the eye can see had not come on its own, but that there is a supernatural being behind it all and that being is God.

God has given us his word, the Bible, which is a guide for us through life. The Bible does not seek to prove the existence of God. The fact that there is a God is assumed throughout scripture. As a matter of fact, the first verse of the Bible is an example where it says, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." God's existence is presented as a statement of fact that needs no proof. We read in Psalm 14:1, "The man who says there is no God is called a fool".

However, even apart from the Bible, there are evidences for the existence of God:

1. Mankind has always believed in a universal being.
2. Creation must have a creator. The universe could not originate without a cause.
3. The wonderful design which we see in creation demands an infinite designer.
4. Since man is an intelligent, moral being, his creator must have been of a much higher order in order to create him.

In the gospel of John 1:1-5 we read, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life and the life was the light of men. And the light

shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not."

I told him that these were words that Jesus told his disciples when he had become man and dwelt among them. I also said that since Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden by disobeying God, all mankind was born into sin and needed a Saviour. Romans 3:23 says, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10 says, "There is none righteous, no not one."

All of us are in need of a saviour. That was why Jesus, God's Son, had come, to give himself a ransom for us, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

I also told him about my own conversion experience and how God had changed my life; that I had the peace of God in my heart. As I talked, he listened. When I was finished, I asked him, "Do you know any born again Christians?" He said that he believed the girl he wanted to marry was a Christian. After a pause he said, "I believe my brother Jake is also one."

"Okay," I said, "Now you know three born again Christians. There are thousands or millions more that you don't know."

We had a time of Bible study and discussion that lasted almost two hours.

I assured him that if he was really sincere in knowing God, God would reveal himself to him, because Jesus loves us all and is concerned for the individual. Jesus says in Matthew 11:28 and 29, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Also, in John 1:12, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."

When I noticed that there was a stillness in the room, I asked, "Peter, would you like to kneel with me and ask Jesus to come into your heart?"

There was no hesitation in kneeling before God. So I prayed, thanking God for sending Peter to me and also that we could have this quiet time together. I asked the Lord to help Peter confess his sins and to

accept salvation which is free for all.

When I was finished praying, he was quiet. He could not pray. It reminded me of my experience in Russia, when my friend John Ratzlaff had talked to me that last evening in our village. I also had not been able to pray. I had felt as if the devil held my mouth shut. So we got to our feet. I thanked him for coming, and assured him that I would keep on praying for him until he too could rejoice in the Lord. When he left, he thanked me for my time and for the help I had been to him. I also assured him that I would ask my friends to pray for his victory. I asked him to keep in touch.

About a week later, he phoned me and told me that he was being transferred to Quesnel, B.C. I asked him to come and see me before he left.

One morning he showed up. I asked him if he had a Bible, and he said he didn't. So I took him next door to the Christian book store and bought a Bible for him. At first he refused to accept it, because he said he could pay for it himself. I asked him to accept it as a gift from me. I said, "Please read it with an open mind, prayerfully, and God will speak to you. I will pray for you." With that we said goodbye.

Later I got a letter from him with the following information. When he arrived in Quesnel, the electrical inspector in that district had met him at the station. The two of them had been together all day. Before evening, this inspector had told Peter that the Christian Businessmen in their town had planned a supper for that evening and he wondered whether Peter would like to join them. Peter said he would.

He was introduced to other men at this dinner and after the meal, they had a testimony meeting. During this time Peter came under conviction of sin. The men surrounded Peter and talked and prayed with him until midnight, when he finally broke through and found the forgiveness of sin. A wonderful peace came into his heart.

The next day he phoned his girlfriend and told her what had happened and that he would write me a letter and tell me all about it. She phoned me at once and told me the news. Now we all rejoiced and

thanked God for the wonderful work of grace he had performed in the life of Peter.

Within a week I had a letter from him, telling me his whole conversion experience. He said that they were planning a wedding now, and wanted me to perform the ceremony. This was a great honor to me. I did it gladly.

On their wedding day the church was full. I preached on Proverbs 31:10-31 "Who can find a virtuous woman..." This really was a day of rejoicing for us all. After the wedding they moved to Quesnel, where Peter continued in his work. He was a happy man. Now he was a Christian, he had a Christian wife and together they started working in the church.

I have met Peter from time to time in the years that followed. He is going on with the Lord and working for him. I thank God for allowing me to have had a part in his life.

BUILDING A NEW STORE

As I mentioned earlier, when we started on Fraser Highway in 1950, we bought an old office building, renovated it and added living quarters to the back, so we had all the necessities. But the store was cheaply built. With the heavy snow fall we had in the 1950's, I wondered at times whether the roof would cave in, since I noticed movements on the ceiling. Whenever it snowed, I always shovelled the snow off. Had I known that the roof joists were only made of 2 x 3's instead of 2 x 8's or 2 x 10's and that they were three feet apart instead of 16 inches, I could not have slept at night. But I only found these things out in 1957 when we tore the building down.

We moved all of our stock of shoes into Rev. A. Loewens empty book store next door, and two of our clerks, Betty Doerksen and Ingie Doerksen sold shoes from there, while I built a new two storey building out of cement blocks. The building was 30 feet by 60 feet, with lots of room for shoes on one side. We rented the other half to Katie's sister, Mary Green, for a woman's clothing store. The Green's had their living quarters above the store. This was the first two storey concrete block building in Clearbrook.

Upstairs I built rooms with an entrance from the

front, for a dentist. After a few months of practise, he developed cancer and died. Mr. John J. Schulz was so kind and helped with the financing of this building.

We built our personal living quarters a little distance away, behind the store, facing Dueck Crescent. We had a living room, large dining room, two bedrooms, washroom, utility and office.

When the store was completed, we moved all our stock back in, and bought a large amount of new stock from Vancouver. We had large shoe windows in the store and in the centre of the front, we had a show window which Mary filled with the latest styles in women's clothing.

When everything was arranged, we put an ad in the M.S.A. News, announcing the opening of our new building and that we would be selling shoes and womens clothing.



SPACIOUS INTERIOR OF STORE SHOWING
FITTING SEATS . . .

Opening day we had five clerks on the floor and we were very busy serving coffee, donuts and cookies, but we also had the best day ever in shoe sales. Some older people enjoyed the opening so much they found it difficult to leave.

THE CLEARBROOK WAILING WALL

Not only did people come to buy shoes, but some also came to pour out their hearts. Sometimes it was a concern about their own family members. Other times they came and complained about someone else's wrong doings. One old man came and complained about his wife. A few hours later, his wife came and complained about her husband! I found that if I took time to listen, they were willing to accept a few words of advise or encouragement and they left with their burdens lifted.

Young people usually came around nine, just before closing. They wanted to speak to me or receive counsel, or make confessions.

One young man came to tell me that he had smuggled different articles across the border and he wondered what he should do about it. It bothered him so much that he could not find rest.

I suggested that he should go back to the customs office and tell them exactly what he had done. He should tell them the value of the goods he had smuggled. I told him, "Peace will never come to your heart until you go back and confess where you have failed."

He was afraid to go, so we prayed about it and asked the Lord to help him make this confession. I told him they would not sentence him to jail, but would most likely charge him duty for the amount he had brought across.

Encouraged, he got into his car and left.

Within an hour he was back, and with joy in his heart, he told me that he had to pay around \$20.00 and now he felt free again. He later went to Bible School, married and went into mission work. "God can only use a clean vessel to His glory."

Another man came to see me late one night. He was a church member, but said he had never really been born again when he had joined the church. He had

joined the church with a group of other young men. He had been baptised, but not upon his faith. Now he had made a conversion experience at the Brunk Tent meetings in Abbotsford and had the joy of the Lord in his heart. His question was: Would the church be willing to baptise him once more, upon his faith in Jesus Christ, as his personal Saviour. I assured him there would be no problem and he was baptized the second time.

SELLING OUR SHOE STORE

As time went on, my involvement in the church work increased. My involvement included preaching in our church and being in different committees. I also received invitations to preach in other churches from time to time. Many times my wife was home alone with one or two clerks, serving the public, since the stores were open until nine every night. She was always busy, doing housework, raising our family, having a smile for everyone who came to our store. Many times I felt that she should be relieved of that pressure.

During those years I continued to get requests to have chimneys, fireplaces or cabinets built. At times I felt that I could probably make a living in construction alone, and relieve my family of the business pressure. I knew my wife Katie had done more than her share to help me get established; more than I ever had anticipated; but she is a person who can apply herself in any situation. I shall be forever grateful to her.

In the fall of 1958, we sold our business to Jake and Lydia Derksen. They moved upstairs and paid rent for the store and living quarters. Now my wife Katie was free and I could go out and do construction work. I must say to the glory of God, that He always provided enough work for us to make a fair living.

In 1959 I sold the store building to Jacob J. Klassen. Then I bought a lot on Princess Street in Clearbrook from my brother John. We moved our house onto it and added a carport, and a utility room. We really loved living in a quiet new subdivision. We had a nice yard and garden. Our family felt very much at home.



The first three elected to the Executive of the Tabor Home. Left to Right: Jakob J. Klassen, Jakob P. Martens, Abram Friesen.

ANSWERING GOD'S CALL

One nice evening in 1955, an elderly lady, Mrs. J. Schmoor, who lived across from the Clearbrook M. B. Church, came to see me. Heavy hearted, she asked me whether I would take time to listen to her concern. I sensed that she had something special on her mind. (Since I was the associate leader in our church, many times people came to me for advise or help.)

I asked Mrs. Schmoor to sit down. At once she started talking about herself. She had been a widow for three years and was already in her eighties. Now she feared that she might die suddenly and she worried about what would happen to her daughter, Katharina. She said that Katharina could not stay in the house by herself, since she was not well enough to manage on her own. She was concerned about how her daughter

But that was not to last very long. In 1959 - 1960 I was very busy in construction work. The future looked bright for me. The economy had improved a lot, and the building trade looked promising. I thought to myself that if conditions kept improving, we could look forward to an early retirement. We were happy in our church work and we thought this was all that God required of us. But God had a different plan. He used people to change our course in life.

If you keep on reading, you will see how God intervenes at times, stops you in your tracks, and says, "You may only go this far!"

If we are really dedicated to do His Will, then our heart and mind is open, ready and willing to do what He asks of us. We were to realize that what we read in Proverbs 19:21 is true where it says: "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails." We can only be happy and be a blessing to others if we are in the Will of God, even if we think that the task is too great, or that we are not qualified to do that particular work. But if God calls, we need to obey. What you are about to read, includes a large portion of our life. So keep on reading, the best is still to come.



The New Shoe Store in 1957.

would manage if she died.

She asked me to bring the following to the attention of the Church Council. She wished that the church would build a large house on her lot, so that her daughter and others in need, could be taken care of.

I promised I would bring this matter to the Council as soon as possible. But I also knew that her lot was too small for such a project, but I didn't tell her that, because I didn't want her to be discouraged. She left, knowing that at least she had done her part by drawing attention to the need for a home for the needy and the elderly.

When I brought the matter to Council, it was voted down, because the lot was too small.

Shortly after that, Mrs. Schmoor had a stroke and was completely paralyzed. She never spoke another word. Two deacons and I took her to the hospital, and after three years, she died.

ANOTHER REQUEST FOR A SENIOR CITIZEN HOME

A number of older men came to visit me during the day in our store. One of them was Brother Jakob Schmidt. It was during those years that a society was formed and Columbia Bible Camp was started. Often he said that it wasn't fair that so much land had been bought for a summer camp, and so much money had been spent on large buildings, swimming pool and sauna, and that the older people were neglected. He said, "Nothing is being done for us. What we really need is an old folks home."

I said, "Brother Schmidt, the next time we have a council meeting, I will bring this matter up once more. I hope the brethren will see the need for it."

When I brought this need up at the council meeting, the brethren all agreed to bring this important question to the attention of the Board of Reference and Council, so that all church leaders could vote on the issue.

This was a completely new idea to the brethren, but no one objected to it. Instead, they elected three brethren to look into the matter. They asked these men to make contact with all the churches in our conference, and find out if a need for such a home

really existed.

The following brethren were elected: Jakob J. Klassen (Chilliwack), Jakob P. Martens (Yarrow), and Abram J. Friesen, (Clearbrook).

We met together shortly after we were elected and discussed how we could start this new project. We agreed to put together a questionnaire, and sent copies to each church on September 13, 1956. This questionnaire was primarily for an invalid home, although it also asked for details on how many church members were between the ages of fifty and seventy and over.

It took some time before these questionnaires were returned to us. In the meantime, brother Jakob Klassen had written letters to different government offices, and finance organizations for information on how such a home could be built.

Our first letter from the Minister of Health and Welfare informed us that Welfare would pay \$65.00 a month per person and \$150.00 a month for an invalid. In the letter he recommended that "It is not advisable to have both the healthy and the sick under the same roof. It would be better to have a separate establishment for each category." This was clear to us.

In the meantime the questionnaire arrived from the churches, which gave us good insight into the need for a home. The results of the questionnaire told us that we had 750 church members who were more than sixty years old. Of these, twenty-six were invalids.

We brought these findings to the next meeting of the Board of Reference and Council.

Our committee visited several Old Folks Homes as well as Invalid Homes. We had interviews with the managers of these. We also questioned doctors about their opinions of such institutions.

We prepared a one year budget based on a home with twenty-five beds, which amounted to a sum of \$45,000.00 But when we brought our findings to the B. C. Provincial Conference, asking for support in this matter, it was voted down, because the members felt they needed more information and clarification.

So we worked hard to get more details so we could give the B. C. Conference a clearer picture of what was involved.

We found that the Provincial Government would give us a grant of 33% for a Senior Citizen Home, but not for an Invalid Home. We would have to contribute 10% of the money and the balance of \$50,000 to \$60,000 would either be borrowed from the bank, or would come from the churches contributions. The estimated cost of building such a home was about \$100,000.00

Several factors seemed to show up in the resistance we faced from the conference. One was that our conference was already supporting a great mission project. The other was that some churches had no members who would need the extra care of an invalid home or old folks home. At times we were discouraged, but we were determined not to give up. Some people would ask us why the issue was dragging along so slowly. Others would admonish us and still others would scold us. We tried to explain to all those who talked to us about it that the most important issue was the unity of the Brotherhood, and that had to be established first. As we prayed, the Lord gave us new courage to continue in our search and in our work.

We arranged a special meeting with the Chairman and manager of the Menno Home, Rev. G.J. Peters and Mr. Jakob Brucks. We felt that these brethren were in favour of us going ahead in the construction of another home. They gave us all the information we needed. The Menno Home was already operating in a dual fashion by having a home for the aged, and also one for intermediate care. So we were encouraged to build a home for the aged.

In the meantime we looked around for a suitable location. The question of finances had to be arranged and clarified. A blueprint had to be made before we could present our case to Victoria, since we could not pursue it without their financial assistance.

On Nov. 1, 1958, we found our project on the agenda of the B. C. Conference again. For the third time we gave a report of our different findings, meetings and possibilities. Again many questions were raised which we answered to the best of our ability. After a lengthy discussion, they voted on the issue. Again the majority voted against it.

At this point we asked the brethren in our conference to drop the issue from their agenda, and give us the freedom to organize a society, and with

God's help, we would go ahead. The conference expressed their thanks and appreciation to our committee for the service we had rendered. They wished us God's blessing if we went ahead to form a society, and build a home for the aged.

THE TABOR HOME COMES TO LIFE

Now we went to work with new courage. We felt like Peter and the other disciples in Luke 5, where Simon says, "Master, we have toiled all night and have caught nothing: nevertheless at Thy word I will let down the net and when they had done this, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes, and their net broke." Here we can see that a great blessing followed obedience.

As a committee, we were convinced that there was a need for a home and that God wanted us to build one. Now we were no longer bound to the churches or the conference any longer, but were free to make new plans. So we continued prayerfully.

The investigation committee had another meeting and decided to form a society. We let the moderator of our M. B. Conference know about our plan in a letter on March 24, 1959. We outlined several recommendations which we asked him to bring to the churches attention. They were:

1. To drop the building of an invalid home on a conference scale.
2. Any person who is in good standing with a Mennonite Church may become a member of the society.
3. Each church of our M.B. Conference should nominate one brother to recruit members.
4. Individual churches, womens clubs, Christian businesses, could each have one membership right.

Following the letter to the moderator, we sent all the church leaders a publication announcing that an organizational meeting would be held on September 24, 1959, Lord willing, in the Clearbrook M.B. Church. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss:

- a. Necessity of a home
- b. Organization of a Society
- c. Membership fees

- d. Name for the home for the aged
- e. Incorporational questions

CHEERFUL COURAGE AND NEW BLOOD

A good number of brethren turned out for this meeting. Each church had sent a representative who was responsible for recruiting members from his church. A stirring but brotherly deliberation followed our presentation. The results of the meeting were:

1. Membership fees were set at \$50.00 per person.
2. It was unanimously decided to call it the Tabor Home. (With this name we wanted to say that all those older brethren and sisters should rise once more to Tabor's heights, and so have the opportunity and privilege to dwell in the presence of our Lord.)
3. Working committee elected was:
Jakob J. Klassen Abe J. Friesen
Jakob P. Martens Jacob Lepp
Albert Dyck Henry P. Hooge

Nearly all the people present paid a membership fee of \$50.00 that night. We were incorporated according to law, and consequently according to the constitution, we now had the right to undertake certain projects.

LOCATION OF THE TABOR HOME

The brethren in the committee were asked to look around for a suitable location consisting of between two to three acres. Of the four locations we chose, two were close to the old MEI, one was west of Clearbrook Road and the other was south of Peardonville Road.

Since we had already contacted the Central Mortgage and Housing Corp. in New Westminster regarding assistance for the building project, we also showed them the four different sites of land available. They advised us to take the third one, west of Clearbrook Road. They felt this was the best place because it was centrally located, only two

blocks from the business section, which made it convenient for shopping, and it was also a pleasant area.

At the next meeting the committee recommended that the Society purchase this property for the Tabor Home under the following conditions: The full price was \$13,500. We offered to pay \$4,000 down with \$2,000 payments each year, the balance by 1966 at 6% interest. Under the terms we also received the Title at once, so we could apply for a loan from the bank.

The Society members accepted these terms and we were free to conclude the deal with Mrs. Enns.

On July 5, 1960 we received a letter from the Deputy Provincial Secretary of Victoria telling us that they would give a grant of \$41,253. to the Tabor Home Society. They wished us good success in the building of the home.

By this time we had 152 members and we were able to make the down payment on the land. We arranged financing with the B.C. Central Credit Union.

Mr. Abram Goerz drew up the preliminary plans for the home. We took these to Mr. W. Noppe in Vancouver to have them made into a blueprint. As the building contractor, we chose Mr. Henry Hiebert (Hub Construction). We also made arrangement with the subtrades.

On July 18, 1960 we had the sod turning celebration. A good number of people turned out for this. Jakob Klassen was in charge of the celebration. Rev. Herman Voth, our Provincial Conference leader, had a short message, and spoke the dedication prayer. Mr. Peter Warkentin was present with his bulldozer, and made a start clearing the bush and digging the basement.

THE TABOR HOME BECOMES A REALITY

Now we progressed very rapidly. The building committee consisted of:

Jakob Klassen Abe Friesen Albert Dyck

From time to time we had a general meeting; with all the members to acquaint them with the progress of the building and also to discuss important issues. Rules and regulations for the Tabor Home Society were made up and these are still valid today.

Eventually the question about house parents came up. We sent a notice to all church leaders, to make this important need known in their churches, so that whoever felt called for this task should let us know. Before long we had seven couples on our list. Now we had to make the decision. After a prayerful discussion, Mr. and Mrs. Henry P. Hooge of Clearbrook were chosen to become the house parents.

We needed to purchase all the kitchen equipment, including china, cutlery, tables, chairs, etc. The chapel needed chairs and couches. Curtains were made for the windows. We got the help of many different ladies from various churches. The Hooges were always involved.

The Tabor Home had room for 39 residents and we had enough applications from people wanting to come in. So we sent out 39 invitations for people to move into the home on March 20, 1961.

BAD NEWS

One week before the opening of the home, Mr. Hooge had an attack and was ill. We were told that these attacks repeated themselves from time to time. Some of the old people felt uneasy about moving into the home if the manager was not well. Now the board was forced to look for someone else.

We met in the chapel of the Tabor Home to examine the list of names again. But the brethren in the board could not come to any decision. Then the chairman, Jacob Klassen, turned to me and asked me to take charge of this home. This came as a great surprise. I was very busy building houses and had lined up a whole years work.

But the brethren were unanimous in their request and asked me to go home and talk it over with my family. They would wait for me to come back with a decision.

Heavy hearted I left for home. This was the hardest decision and the hardest road our family had ever set foot on. Since we expected the old folks to move in within a week, we had to make a quick decision.

As a family we talked things over. We also cried, because the house parents were expected to move

into the home so the people could have someone to look after them day and night in case of emergency. "What a responsibility"

This decision meant leaving our home, which we loved, and moving into an old folks home with our two high school daughters. To top it off, the wages were scanty. Since there was a pressing need, with tears in our eyes and trusting God, we decided to take over this great task for one year. We knew that this would change our future plans to a great extent. With a heavy heart, I left my family and went back to the waiting brethren, to tell them of our willingness to serve.

The next day, early in the morning, my dear wife Katie had to start working in the home. That first day she worked until midnight. I had to hire extra men to help me finish the house I was building (which was already sold). Of course I had to cancel the five homes that I was to have built that year. In all of this, the Lord supplied grace and strength to do the work.

Twenty people moved into the Tabor Home on March 20, 1961. This was a very busy day for us. Within three weeks all thirty-nine rooms were occupied. Now we planned the dedication of the new Tabor Home.

We sent a message to all the church leaders to announce that the dedication service would take place on April 18, 1961. Everyone was welcome.



Dedication of the Tabor Home, 1961

When this festive day came, our chapel could not hold the visitors. There was an overflow crowd in the halls and in the office. The interest was much greater than we had anticipated. All the speakers displayed a positive attitude towards this new venture. Jacob Klassen chaired the meeting and the speakers were: Mr. Stilborn from the Central Mortgage and Housing Corp., Mr. Doug Taylor, Mayor of Matsqui, Mr. Tom Anderson, from the Welfare Office in Abbotsford, Mr. Henry Hiebert, the contractor and Rev. P. R. Toews delivered the message. After the ceremonies, everyone was invited to stay for coffee and to have a tour of the home.

When all the excitement was over, and all the visitors had left, we breathed a sigh of relief. We were on our own. However, there was much left to be done.

The following day we gathered rocks, raked the stones together and hauled them away by truck loads. Some of the older men in the Home helped a lot in this.

Then we seeded the lawn, planted shrubs, trees and flowers, and also planted a large garden in the south side of the Home. Brother Gerhard Dyck did a marvellous job outside. He was a member of the board and was asked to be in charge of the outside work. He had his heart in this work. With great delight he helped to beautify the place. It was a pleasure to work with him. He did all this work free, as unto the Lord.

OUR STAFF

When we began our work in the Tabor Home we had a staff of four ladies. They were:

Elfrieda Nickel - cleaning rooms and office

Mary Janzen - laundry two days a week; kitchen

Margarete Schartner - kitchen (2 months)

Anna Loewen (Now Mrs. John Krahn) - kitchen

(She came as a God send to take over the cooking. She worked faithfully many years.

Everyone enjoyed her cooking & baking.)

Nettie Peters (Now Nettie Wiebe) - kitchen

As the need arose, we hired others like Erna Fast, Marlene Thiessen, Betty Doerksen part time. Eventually we hired two ladies who traded off during

the night because I could not be around twenty-four hours a day. These were Anna Warkentin and Maria Peters.

My wife Katie supervised all the work in the kitchen, planned the menus, and helped with purchasing the groceries. She was also in charge of planning all the girls' work and delivering all the mail to the residents.

Men who served in the maintenance during our time were A. H. Thiessen, Herman Klassen, Abram Ratzlaff, Jakob Rempel (served the longest). The last one was Herman Voth who also had the Bible Studies on Thursday nights.



Tabor Home Staff in 1972.

LADIES WHO WORKED WITH US BETWEEN 1961 - 1975

Elfrieda Nickel
Nettie Peters
Erna Fast

Mary Janzen Margarete Schartner
Anna Loewen Marlene Thiessen
Margarete Berg Mrs. H. Neufeld

Betty Doerksen
Anna Warkentin
Mary Burkholder
Eva Penner
Renata Penner
Helen Thielman
Annie Funk
Hilda Giesbrecht
Lotto Fast
Liese Janzen

Hilda Wiebe
Maria Peters
Agnes Geddert
Kay Peters
Katie Penner
Helena Funk
Erna Maier
Anna Ratzlaff
Heidy Regier
Margarete Falk

Margarete Martens
Martha Funk
Olga Wiens
Lydia Janzen
Martha Knelsen
Susie Funk
Hilda Kroeker
Helen Letkeman
Mary Siemens

FIRST BOARD MEMBERS

Jakob J. Klassen
Jacob Lepp
Albert Dyck
Gerhard Dyck

Jacob Martens
Frank Peters
John Thiessen
Johann Brandt

Henry Hooge
J.P. Dick
Jacob Janzen
John Voth



Tabor Home Board Members.

These brethren helped guide and direct the work of the Tabor Home. Brother Jacob Martens served on the board for eighteen years, most of the time as chairman. He gave unselfishly of his time and talent, and was always ready to help or give suggestions, when I needed them. May God reward you for it, dear

brother Jake.

My wife and I served as administrators in the Tabor Home from March 14, 1961 until September 30, 1975, a total of fourteen and a half years.

During those years we experienced much love and encouragement from the residents, staff and members of the board, as well as from outsiders. We often said we were not worthy of it.

But the work in the Home was not always sunshine. We also had to go through stormy situations. But we knew we had the best Pilot possible, and He led us through deep valleys, but also onto Tabor Heights. That was our Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. Daily we came to him for wisdom, grace, courage and strength. Yes, He supplied all of our needs. "To Him be the Glory!"

During our time in the Tabor Home, I learned three words with a capital "L". Look, Love and Listen.

LOOK around for those in need or in trouble

LOVE those who are difficult to love

LISTEN to the heavy-hearted, or those who come with complaints or problems.

In retrospect, as we think of all those dear old people we were able to serve, and to have fellowship with, those with whom we shared joys and sorrows; as we think of the unity with the staff as we worked together year after year and also with the Board members who tried their best to help make this Home a place where people loved to stay until they could go home to be with their Lord; we must say it has been a rich and worthwhile experience. Not that we gained financially, but we learned much by experience.

Through these experiences the love in serving our fellow man could be skilled and cultivated and that is what the Lord Jesus asks of us.

Today we are grateful to God that He led us this way. Eternity will reveal in how far we have done this service out of love to Him and for the dear old people in the Tabor Home.

We close our confession with the words of Jesus, in Luke 17:10, "So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, we are unworthy servants, we have only done our duty!"

I will refrain from writing about the many

experiences in the Home, because those in themselves would fill a book.

The following is a poem written by Agnes Geddert in 1973.

MEET THE STAFF

This little story I would like to begin

With our houseparents the Friesens, who keep us trim
Mrs. Friesen to be sure, hears many a tale

As each room she visits and hands out the mail.
And when she brings her granddaughters for us to see
Then all are delighted as can be.

Numerous are the tasks Mr. Friesen fulfills

First thing in the morning he sets out the pills.
Words of comfort and blessing from God's Word he reads

And unto God's Throne he brings all our needs.
All through the day the folks come with their cares

Then words of encouragement he readily shares.
The groceries too, Friesens must shop for each day
It sure helps to drive the cooks troubles away.

If you come in the kitchen you will meet the cooks

There's Mary and Agnes read the recipe books
Mary's an expert with bread, cookies and cakes

And also those milk soups so tasty she makes
Agnes helps out with other soups and the meat
To share work with Mary that is a real treat

For so many people there's much food to prepare

If it wasn't for Hilda they'd sometimes despair
She peels the potatoes and washes the pots

From the ovens and cupboards she cleans all the spots
The floor she scrubs and the garbage cans too
She just never runs out of work to do.

Tina you'll find cleaning rooms for the men

In the kitchen also she helps now and then
She eats desserts to help Mr. Friesen out

It's really great fun to have her about.

On one of the wings you'll find cheerful Anne

She helps her dear ladies wherever she can
She dusts and cleans and scrubs the floors

For on the wing there are lots of chores.

We have some rooms for married folks too
There you'll see Frieda with much work to do
The chapel and dining room she keeps tidy and bright
She works like a bee from morning til night.

But we can't forget Marga, she's been her so long
Without her around things would surely go wrong
She's always so happy with a smile on her face
She cleans and gives baths and keeps things in place

Then there is Martha who's on the new wing
She's rather particular about each little thing
And Lydia has gotten to be that way too
They won't have a thing but the best and the new.

But we really don't mind, it's quite alright
After all, they try hard to have things just right
We do want their ladies to be happy and gay
So we'll be contented to have it that way.

Now we must mention our laundress too
Our poor Mary Janzen has plenty to do
Many loads of clothes she washes and presses
You should just see all those shirts and those dresses

For part-time help we have Katie and Kay
All kinds of duties come also their way
They help with dishes and set the table
Just give them a call, they are willing and able
Kay you will notice goes quite a speed
When in the kitchen help we need.

When these are all through at the end of a day
Still others come in as they go away
They fix up the tables and serve evening lunch
When you add them all up, it makes quite a bunch

But there are some others that we must include
To forget the night staff that would be rude
They care for the folks that sometimes are ill
While others are sleeping they keep working still
They're right there to help and answer the calls
And the butter they roll into wee little balls

Now this is the gang that make up Tabor Home staff

We work and we talk and sometimes we laugh
If we all work together and all do our best
Our service to these people will surely be blest.



"Absolutely delicious, and tender as chicken", was the verdict of Tabor senior citizens home administrator Rev. A. J. Friesen. Fully cooked hog was presented to the home last week by the National Grain Company. Hog was the table centre piece for the company's meeting held at the Park Hotel where the company announced the construction of the huge hog raising operation in Matsqui. Watching Mr. Friesen carve the 80 pound hog are Mrs. Mary Friesen, cook's assistant; Mrs. Anna Loewen, head cook and Mrs. Kay Peters, assistant cook. Mr. Friesen said the gift had provided two meals for the 100 residents and staff. (Herman Toews photo)

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF ADDITIONS TO THE TABOR HOME

1. The Home began with a north and east wing. In 1963 we added 21 rooms on the west.
2. In 1967 a further addition for 28 persons was added to the southwest, which is now the intermediate care unit. The dining room and chapel were also enlarged at this time.



Tabor Home Residents.



Tabor Home.

3. In 1970 we added a north wing for eleven men.
4. In 1973 a north-west wing was added for 20 residents, along with a sitting room and sewing room.
5. In 1974 the kitchen was enlarged so the bakery could be in a separate room. We also bought a new stove and had new kitchen cabinets made.

THE FAREWELL

Our service in the Tabor Home came to an end on September 30, 1975. I had made the announcement earlier that we would be retiring from our work at the end of September, so everyone knew about it.

After our last supper together, the residents of the home told us to come back to the Home at seven o'clock that evening. We had no idea what had been planned.

When we got there, we noticed that the chapel was filled with the residents and also the staff, who were seated on the west side. Everything was ready and everyone was waiting for us. Now our farewell became reality.

Rev. Heinrich Enns, a resident, chaired the meeting. We were asked to take our places at the front. Rev. Enns announced the significance of this gathering and made the invocation with a song, scripture reading and prayer. The staff followed that with a few songs and some of the older people recited poems which they had made up for this special occasion. It was all very interesting. Rev. G. Warkentin, also a resident, delivered a short but to the point message, from the word of God.

The chairman of the board, Jakob P. Martens spoke words of thanks and acknowledgement to us and at the same time, introduced the new administrative couple, Dave and Katie Friesen. Then I was asked to say a word and brother Dave Friesen was also asked to say a few words.

After the program was over, the people of the Home and also the staff members presented us with some gifts of appreciation.

Finally we came to the real farewell. Some people came to say goodbye with a heavy heart and with tears in their eyes. Others said, "A Friesen is

leaving us and a Friesen is following him." With that they were comforted.

MY ILLNESS TURNED OUT TO BE A BLESSING

In May 1970 we knew we had a very busy summer ahead of us. The board had decided to put another addition onto the north wing, because we had about a dozen men who wanted to move in.

At the end of May, I felt a pain coming into my joints. The pain started in the shoulder, then moved into the hips, knees, ankles, elbows, wrist and fingers. Within three weeks I was in such pain that I could not dress myself.

I went to my doctor (for whom I have the highest regard) and after an examination, he couldn't find the reason for my pain. So he prescribed aspirin which I needed to take every four hours, not exceeding twenty pills a day.

In spite of this, the pain increased and I was going to see him three times a week. Then he gave me relaxing pills and tranquilizers. All this medication made me feel very drugged, but didn't do anything for my pain. Neither my doctor or I knew what to do anymore. So he suggested that I should go to the hospital. I continued with this medication in the hospital, but after eleven days of very little sleep and no appetite, I asked to be discharged.

Upon my request, my doctor sent me to an internal specialist in Chilliwack. This specialist gave me a thorough examination and blood tests and told me that I had rheumathoid arthritis. He said that I should continue with the medication and if that didn't help, he would give me cortizone.

When I got back to my doctor, I asked him to make an appointment with the very best arthritis specialist. Immediately he phoned Vancouver and made an appointment with Dr. True Love from the Arthritis Clinic. After further examinations and tests at the centre, this specialist told me that I had an acute attack of rheumathoid arthritis. He also told me to continue with the medicine and if that didn't help, he would give me cortizone or gold injections. I thanked him and went home.

So now I knew what was really wrong with me. I

announced it at the Tabor Home. I had to quit working because the agony I was going through was unbearable. I was so restless and full of pain that we did not know where to turn, except to God, for help.

I had been to chiropractors, as well as swedish masseurs, but found no relief. So we started praying, "Lord, we have tried to find help from men and all searching has failed. But we know that you can help and that you can heal my body."

The old people and the staff in the Tabor Home were praying for me. The church was praying. Many outsiders and friends who knew me, told me they were praying for me. One day a lady from the Anglican Church called me and told me that a group of ladies from her church was praying for me. When I went to the bank, the tellers who knew me and saw my distress said, "We are praying for your recovery, Mr. Friesen." The receptionist at my doctor's office told me she was praying for me. It was overwhelming for me. I was stirred to tears as I sensed the compassion of these people on my behalf.

One day, Mr. and Mrs. Dave Neumann came to see us. When they saw the anguish I was in, they suggested that we take a short holiday and they offered to take us to Penticton (a summer resort town) for a week to spend some time with us. Katie thought this was a good idea, and so we left the next day.

We rented a duplex motel where we could do our own cooking. During the day we could be out by the lake, sitting under a shady tree, or in the sun and sand.

I was in such pain that I could not sleep in the beds. I was too restless. I asked Katie to put the foam mattress on the floor, to see if I would be able to sleep better there. In spite of all the medication, I had very little sleep.

Several mornings I got up between three and four, tried my best to dress quietly, and slipped out of the room. Then I walked very slowly on the sidewalks of Penticton, praying to God for deliverance from this pain. (Since there was no one in sight, I could read my Bible and pray undisturbed.)

I searched my heart, yes, my whole life, to see where I had done wrong, and pleaded with God for forgiveness. It seemed that God had hidden his face

from me.

I claimed certain promises, like Psalm 34:6 where David, also in distress, calls out: "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all troubles."

I said, "Lord, I am in the same position. I asked for cleansing, for restoration and for healing. Please help me. I depend on thee only. Men have tried to help but have failed."

I also prayed like the Psalmist in Psalm 130, "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice, let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication. If thou O Lord shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning; I say, more than they that watch for the morning, for with the Lord there is mercy and with him is plentiful redemption."

Spending this time reading the Bible and praying gave me comfort and hope that my God would help me. I just didn't know how or when. Many times I prayed, "Oh Lord, if you have anything for me to do in this world, you will restore me. I will give you the praise and honor. If you want to take me home to glory, I am willing to go."

When we got back to Clearbrook, without any change in my health, someone suggested that we should try Harrison Hot Springs for a week, so we rented a cabin there and took a hot bath in the mineral pool, which made the pain even worse. Then the manager of the hotel made an appointment for me to have a massage at the Harrison Hotel the next day.

First I had to sit in the hot pool for twenty minutes. Then the masseur gave me a massage. When he was finished, he took my hands, told me to relax and then he jerked them with a quick, short pull, which caused a terrible pain in my joints. He also did this to my legs. It felt as if he had torn the joints apart. I didn't go back to the hot pool or the masseur again.

We stayed at Harrison for another four days and then left for home, with no improvement in my

condition. (During my illness, and absence from the Tabor Home, the board hired brother Peter C. Penner to replace me. He was also a board member.)

WAITING ON GOD FOR A MIRACLE

As I mentioned earlier, many Christians were praying for us. We were waiting on God, believing that He would do something for me.

One day my neighbour told me that he had had bursitis in his shoulder, and that a lady in New Westminster had helped him with a few treatments. This made me curious.

The next day I met another man who told me that he had a heart condition, and that he had gone to see a lady in New Westminster, who had been able to help him. Both men had been to see the same lady, Mrs. Ena Campbell. This man gave me her address and the next day Katie and I went to see her.

She had her practise in the basement. When we walked down the steps, I saw about a dozen people sitting and waiting for a treatment. I was amazed. I asked, "Are you all sick and have you all come here for healing?" I must have asked it loudly, because all at once a door opened and a tall, stout lady stood in the doorway. She asked me what she could do for me. I asked her if she was Mrs. Campbell and she said she was. I told her that I had rheumathoid arthritis and wished to have a treatment. She told me to come back at two o'clock.

When we returned, she took me into her treatment room and asked me to sit down in a reclining chair. She was a reflexologist and worked on the nerve endings of the feet. I told her that I was very ticklish on my feet, but she was so gentle and talked so pleasantly, that I had complete confidence in her.

She told me that years ago she had been ill, and had not been able to get help from doctors, so she had gone to California for these treatments. When she realized that these treatments helped her, she had come home and had given herself these treatments until she was completely well. By the time I met her, she had been able to help thousands of others. This was very encouraging to me.

She also told me that she was not a doctor, but

that she would suggest that I should take some vitamins, like Vitamin C, calcium, bone meal, cod liver oil pills and others. She said they were all from natural sources and would never hurt me, but could help me.

She encouraged me to come back for more treatments. The purpose of these treatments was to improve the blood circulation in the body. If a good blood supply is prevailing in our systems, it helps to heal the sick and sluggish organs and parts of our body.

When I had been in the hospital, the doctor had ordered me to do certain exercises, since I could not raise my arms or stretch them out, because doing so was too painful. I continued doing these exercises as much as possible. I also continued taking all my medicine. My stomach was burning from all the aspirin and in the mornings my tongue was coated, and the taste of food went against me.

Then one day I walked into a health food store in Abbotsford and asked for a natural pain killer. The clerk told me that there were none, but she asked what my problem was. I told her that I had rheumathoid arthritis which gave me alot of pain in my joints. Then she turned around, picked up a pamphlet, and gave it to me. It was a "Rheuma Arthritis Cure" - a natural cure from Germany. It consisted of two bottles of horseradish juice, four bottles of birch juice and two packages of couch grass roots which were used to make a tea. It also listed things which should be eaten and things which should not be eaten.

1. WHAT NOT TO EAT

Coffee, tea, sugar, pepsi, coke, pastry, cookies or anything made from bleached white flour.

No pork or beef.

2. WHAT I COULD EAT

Brown, whole wheat bread, whole wheat buns, muffins

Chicken, fowl or fish

Water, camamoille, peppermint or alfalfa teas, or postum (Caf-lib)

Lots of green vegetables, especially celery, carrots, cabbage, beets and fresh fruits.

I bought this pack of herbal cure for treating my

problem. I took it before meals three times a day and kept strictly to my diet. At the end of the twenty-four day cure, I already felt a difference and was able to go back to work. Gradually I reduced the number of aspirin and relaxing pills. After two months I took this herbal cure treatment again. By the time I was half way through, all my pain was gone and I felt as free as a bird! I could swing my arms and legs again without pain!

These natural elements contain the power of nature, and they had dissolved and loosened the toxins in my system and had allowed them to be discharged. I quit all my medication and haven't taken an aspirin since. Many times we thanked God for answering our prayers.

I continued getting the foot treatments one or two evenings a week. My wife started taking them too and one day she said, "Abe, you should learn how to do this too!"

So in the winter of 1971 I took some private lessons. In July 1971 I took the initial course from Professional Reflexologists from the U.S.A. and received my certificate as reflexologist. In the course we studied the "Human Anatomy", consisting of organs and glands and how they function, the nervous system, zone therapy, and gland reflexes as well as the method of compression massage.

I took this course another five times, learning new techniques each time. I also bought numerous books on body healing and massaging, dealing with pressure points and Japanese finger pressure therapy. I bought books by doctors, chiropractors, naturopaths, etc.

All these courses and reading have helped me to remain in good health. Through it I have also been able to give relief to many people who could not find help elsewhere. I have been able to help people with migrane headaches, sciatic nerve problems, neck shoulder or lower back pain, dizziness, cold feet, poor blood circulation and many others. This is all done by manipulation of my hands on the feet, neck or back. I was able to do this work for ten years following my retirement from the Tabor Home. It has been very fulfilling for me and many people have been helped by it.

Some people came with problems they wanted to share. Either personal or family problems. Some even came with spiritual problems and we were able to share in a time of prayer. Many times I felt that God had opened this avenue of service to me to help others. This was the result and blessing that followed my healing from arthritis in 1970. "Praise God."

ADDITIONAL TABOR HOME ACTIVITIES

Spiritual:

Our goal for the residents was that they were to live here on Tabor Heights, (meaning Christian fellowship). Every Sunday morning at nine thirty, we had an hour long service in the chapel with a singing group and a minister. I was always in charge of arranging the services, with congregational singing and the invocation and announcements. Every Sunday a different group came to serve, so the congregation had a good variety of spiritual food. At six o'clock each Sunday we had another service, which was provided by different churches.

Every morning before breakfast I had Bible reading and prayer. Thursday nights, beginning at six o'clock we had Bible study. The first ministers to serve at these Bible studies were Rev. Aaron A. Toews and Rev. Fr. Wiens. Although Rev. Toews was nearly blind, he quoted Bible passages for memory and gave a good message.

In May 1961, Rev. Phillip Wiebe, (a very close friend of mine) offered his services for the weekly Bible studies. He served with great devotion, inspite of his busy work schedule on his farm. He served us for five years until he got sick and had to have heart surgery. He died two months after the surgery.

I have missed that dear brother most, because we were very close. Before he died he told me that in heaven he wanted to preach to those who were saved and who had made it to heaven, but who did not have Bible knowledge while they were still on earth. When he died he left his wife and seven children behind. Often I wished I had those Bible studies on tape. They were thorough, deep and had much food for the spiritual man. "Brother Phillip, may God reward you for your faithful service rendered to these old

saints!"

After that, other men like Rev. C.C. Peters, Rev. Peter Loewen, and Rev. Peter C. Penner served for a number of years. Rev. Henry Regehr, and Rev. Herman Voth also served on Thursdays.

If possible, we tried to have communion one Sunday a month, between six and seven o'clock.

Birthdays:

We had everyone's birth dates on file and once a month we celebrated birthdays. We wrote a fitting scripture verse onto a card, put the birthday persons name on the envelope and on the last Wednesday of the month, after a good birthday dinner, the residents and staff assembled in the chapel. Here I read their scripture verse, mentioned their name and one of the staff members would give the card to the individuals. Being recognized like this was always a highlight for the people. Many times family members would bring a birthday cake and celebrated with their parents or relatives in their own rooms.

Thanksgiving:

We found that the old people in the Home were very missionary minded. After we had been there for a few months, some came and asked if we could have an offering on Sunday morning to support a certain mission project. I agreed to this.

In October we had our Thanksgiving service, with all the decorations that normally go with it. A choir and a special speaker would come to serve us. The collection on that day was always the largest of the year.

The collections raised in 1974 were as follows:

Missions and Services (foreign)	\$4,100.00
Mennonite Central Committee	2,385.27
Inland Mission	927.99
Orphan Support	655.00
Well digging in India	280.20
Africa Mission	200.00
M.S.A. Hospital	232.07
European Mission	178.70
Lepra Mission	151.50
Red Cross	145.18
European Radio Broadcast	121.05

Jewish Mission	109.70
E. European Mission	95.00
TOTAL	<u>\$9,581.66</u>

Christmas:

Christmas Eve was also a highlight for our Tabor Home residents. A few weeks ahead of time I announced the program, so the people could prepare for it. You might ask, "Did the old people take part in the program?" Yes, they did. Some found great pleasure in taking part. Some ladies made up and recited their own poems. A ninety year old lady, Mrs. L. Braun, recited a poem that was ten minutes long, and she never got stuck. Jakob Reimer loved to recite poems in German and in low German and he got everybody to laugh. He would also play the piano and sing to everyone's delight. Another man, Franz Froese, who was in his late eighties, played Santa Claus one Christmas. Another Christmas he told us part of his life story. All the staff and board members were present, together with their wives. This helped in the hearty singing of Christmas songs. We always had a Christmas message and after the program, each resident received a useful little gift.

The staff also had a separate Christmas party, at which we had a meal, testimonies, singing and presentation of small gifts. There were times where we learned to know each other better, in a relaxed atmosphere. Some years someone who had been travelling would show slides. Other times we also played games. We all looked forward to this time of fellowship.

Ladies Club:

The following is a report given by my wife to the Tabor Home friends at an annual meeting in 1969.

"We are happy to report that we have a ladies meeting every other Tuesday. We are grateful to God for always giving us a sister who can give leadership in this regard. For this year Mrs. H. P. Neufeld is in charge. She is assisted by Mrs. J. Harder. We appreciate their service very much.

Visiting ladies from different churches also come and serve with invocation and with several songs.

This year we had groups from West Abbotsford, Bakerview, South Abbotsford, Clearbrook, Ebenezer and East Aldergrove Churches. We have enjoyed their singing and their fellowship.

1. First is the invocation with a song, reading of scripture and prayer.
2. Each lady present recites a Bible verse by memory.
3. Bible Study is led by Mrs. Neufeld.
4. Closing with a song by the group and prayer.

The ladies in the Home are always busy. Some make things for M.C.C. Some knit bandages for dressing wounds, and others roll these bandages. Others sew blankets from patches of cloth. Some make nice little childrens clothes for the poor and needy overseas. I feel sorry for those who would like to do something, but cannot, because of poor eyesight or some other handicap."

Katie Friesen

Visiting Groups:

On special occasions like Christmas and Easter we often had school children come and bring a program, with their teachers. At times families would come and render a program. The J. Dyck family from Mission came several times a year with their three boys and daughter, and gave us a most wonderful time with their music. The whole family took part, some playing the accordian, and violin and mother playing the piano. Mr. Dyck had a devotional. We always looked forward to their coming.

Staff Outings:

The staff tried to take a day off together once a year for an outing. We went sight-seeing to Victoria or we went to parks and enjoyed a relaxing day together. The cooks prepared all the meals for the Home in advance and for that day we hired a few ladies who helped out from time to time, and who were acquainted with the procedures in the Home.

Monday was always our day off. On this day I asked one of the minister brethren to lead in the morning devotion and in saying grace at mealtime. By the grace of God there was good harmony between ourselves, the staff and the residents. We felt like

a family that belonged together. Of course, at times there was need for discipline too, which was not pleasant, but had to be done.

Hospital Visits and How Different People Die:

My duties as administrator also included looking after the lonely in their rooms and the sick in the Home or in the hospital. At times we had patients in five or six different hospitals, although most of them were usually in the MSA Hospital. If they were close enough, I visited the sick every other day, either during the day if I had time, or in the evenings. A number of times I sat at their bedside during their dying moments. It is beautiful to see a Christian die in a peaceful state. How different from those who don't know the Lord.

I will just mention a few incidents related to hospital visits. One lady was troubled with doubts and fears, concerning her salvation. She found it very hard to cope with life. Many times when I went into her room, either alone or with my wife Katie, she would tell us about her severe conflicts and struggle. She always feared she would not make it to heaven. So we read passages of scripture to her that give assurance that we are accepted by God. Passages like John 3:37 where Jesus says, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Or a verse like Romans 10:10 - "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." She found these passages too difficult to grasp, since her body and her nerves were very run down. We all believed that she was a child of God, but there was an inner cry in her heart for the real joy of the Lord. Her heart's cry was like David's in Ps. 50:11-12, "Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free spirit."

Talking and reading about the goodness of God and having prayer together would usually lift her spirit, and we could tell that she was happier again. All at once she got sick, and the doctor suggested she should go to the hospital. I took her in my car and as we were driving she said, "I wonder whether this will be

my last trip to the hospital?" I said, "Only God knows, but he has a much better place prepared for you."

She was in the hospital for about a week. I visited her several times but no change had taken place in her condition. On her last morning, she got up from her bed and went to the washroom. When she got back, she lay down on her bed, folded her hands, and according to the lady in the next bed, she said, (as if she had seen Jesus passing by), "Lord Jesus, please take me along." Those were her last words. What a beautiful homegoing experience for a Christian. Dear friend, it pays to hold on to Jesus and His Word, the Bible. To her family, who knew her best, these last words were a great consolation.

Another unique experience I would like to relate involved a very dear lady, Mrs. Enns. She needed hospital care, so I took her in for treatments. When my wife and I visited her, we noticed that she was fully surrendered to God's will in her life. On our last visit together, as we sat at her bedside and talked, she told us how good the Lord had been throughout her life, even during the hard years in Russia, when many people had starved to death. While she talked, she raised herself up and sat in her bed. Katie reminded her again how she had given Katie's family something to eat when they had nothing. (Katie's mother had died and her father was sick in bed with T.B. in Russia.)

When I thought this dear old saint needed rest, I took my Bible, read a portion of scripture and prayed with her. When I finished, she started praying, thanking God for giving her salvation through Jesus Christ and for keeping her by His grace for so many years. Then she recited two verses from Ps. 73:23,24 - "Nevertheless I am continually with thee, thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel and afterwards receive me to glory." Then she stopped praying and was quiet. When I looked up, she fell back and had gone to be with Jesus. That was a beautiful homegoing. How true is the verse in Psalm 116:15, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints!"

My friend, as you read about these incidents, is your heart longing for such peace and joy? Do you

really know that you are a child of God or are you afraid of dying? There is nothing more sure than death. Everyone who has lived before us has died. But you still have the opportunity to receive forgiveness of sins and the peace and joy your heart is longing for, if you are willing to follow the invitation in Revelation 22:17, "And the Spirit and the Bride say come, let him that heareth say come, and let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Oh, the peace of God that floods our soul, if we humble ourselves before God and confess our sins to him. We understand the truth of what it says in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." God made it simple for us to become His children. Try it, He will be faithful to you too.

A Mr. A. Loewen, a man in his nineties, often told me that God had forgotten him. Others could die, but he had to live. He was old and tired, but he still loved to talk. In fact he repeated important stories from parts of his life dozens of times. I always listened as if he was telling me his story for the first time, and so we were always on friendly terms.

Gradually he became an invalid and needed more attention and care than we were licensed for, so his family came and took him to live with them. About two weeks later they found him dead in his room, sitting in his rocking chair. This proved that God had not forgotten him, but had wanted to teach him patience. How important it is that we learn to be patient, in our own life, with ourselves, and also with our fellow man. It is important for us to learn to wait on God and on his leading in our life.

Mr. Loewen's family phoned me about their dad's passing, and asked me to preach at his funeral. I promised I would. But my busy schedule didn't allow me to prepare the message during the day, so I worked on it at night. At twelve o'clock I felt hungry and so I went into the kitchen, had some milk and a roasted bun and then went to bed.

Around three o'clock I choked, woke up, could not breathe, and broke out in a terrible sweat. I raised

myself to a sitting position, but could not say a word. Then my wife woke up and wanted me to say something, but I could not speak. Finally I coughed and that gave me bad heartburn. Katie called the doctor immediately and he came at once. By the time he got there I could talk, and so I told him that I had had some milk to drink and had a roasted bun about midnight. I thought that as I was sleeping the acid from my stomach must have come up and got into my wind pipe and choked me. But the doctor was concerned about me and said, "It could have been a heart attack. Mr. Friesen, you need a rest." With that he took me to the hospital for a week, to give me a thorough check up. The results of the tests showed that I was right and that my heart was okay. Because of this experience I missed Mr. A. Loewen's funeral.

One elderly man walked to the bank in Clearbrook. He took a short cut coming home via David Street. When he was halfway home, he dropped dead. A neighbour lady who had seen him fall called to let us know.

Another man came home from Abbotsford in his car. He walked into his room and dropped to the floor, dead.

A dear brother who helped me out when I was on holidays, did not show up for breakfast one morning. After morning devotions I walked into his room and found him in his bed. He was half dressed, lying on his back and could not talk, but with a smile on his face, he pointed to heaven with his hand. I called the doctor and he found that the man had a stroke, so he was taken to the MSA Hospital and never spoke another word. Shortly after this he lost consciousness and after being in a coma for three days, he went to be with his Lord and Master.

I missed that brother very much. His sister-in-law told me later that he had found his place of service in the Tabor Home. He was a wonderful Christian example. At his funeral I preached on the text from John 11:11 where Jesus told his disciples, "Lazarus our friend sleepeth!"

Several ladies in the home died in their sleep during the night. I came to see one lady in the early morning while she was dying.

One dear brother who was totally blind from sugar

diabetes was sick in the hospital, so I took his wife to see him. As we sat beside his bed, I noticed that he was going, but I didn't notice that his wife was looking in a different direction. When he had taken his last breath, I said, "Now he is gone to his reward." "What," she said, "is he dead?" "Yes," I said, "he just took his last breath."

Others again had to suffer for some time, even years, before they were finally relieved. One lady always believed she was full of cancer, but she died fifteen years later, not of cancer, but of old age.

OUR DAUGHTERS GET MARRIED

As you recall, we moved into the Tabor Home with our two teenage daughters, Betty and Renetta. They dreaded the thought of moving into an old folks home because, they said, "We'll loose all our friends." But this didn't prove to be true. Instead, I think they gained even more friends. Many times they brought some of their girlfriends along from school and we enjoyed them too. At times boys would also show up on Sunday afternoons.

Our girls occupied a one bedroom suite upstairs, above the kitchen. They had a seperate living room, seperate bathroom as well as a little kitchenette and bedroom. The suite gave them lots of privacy. They had the piano in their living room and many times the young people would gather there and have a really good time, discussing things, singing and laughing. Our doors were always open for their friends. Some Sunday afternoons we took the girls and their friends for a ride in our station wagon, then we would buy them ice cream and give them a good time.

But the time came where two boys came more often than others. This showed us that they had more than only friendship in mind. They were already making future plans. I often told our girls that when they looked for a man to marry, they should be sure of his character and behaviour, they should get to know his parents and see whether they could fit into his family, because marriage is for life. Since they had all attended MEI together, they thought they knew each other well enough.



Our girls, Betty and Renetta, graduation.

Many times, just to please the girls, we took them to basketball games where their boyfriends were playing. I have never been a great sportsman, except for the games we played at home when we were young. I did not grow up in the sports environment our young people do today, and I believe it goes to the extreme at times. If sports comes first in life, then I am not for it.

Our oldest daughter, Betty, was going steady with Jim Falk, who was a great basketball player. Betty graduated from high school and also went to Bible School for a year. When Jim went to the M.B. Bible College in Winnipeg, Betty was working at Penner's Pharmacy in Clearbrook. With Jim in Winnipeg and Betty in Clearbrook, they both were very lonesome for each other. Correspondence went in both directions, which reminded me about Katie's and my correspondence.

One day we received a letter from Jim asking for permission to propose to Betty. We had been expecting this to happen anytime. Of course we responded that we would entrust her into his care. When he came home from college in spring they were officially engaged.

Their wedding took place on July 28, 1966. Theirs was the very first wedding in the Bakerview M.B. Church in Clearbrook. Betty's cousin, Rev. Jacob H. Friesen officiated at the wedding.

After their honeymoon, Betty went back to work at Penner's Pharmacy and Jim also worked for a year. Then he decided to go into the teaching profession and

so he went back to school, first to Trinity College and then Western Washington University, where he received his B.A. in Education. During those years Betty worked to support them. Jim accepted a teaching position at Chilliwack Junior Secondary in September 1970. Over the years he has been involved in the basketball program with junior high school boys. Under Jim's coaching the school has produced twelve championship teams in fourteen years.

Jim and Betty have two daughters, Julia Deanne who was born July 4, 1970 and Tracey Jeanette, born on June 19, 1972. The girls are fifteen and thirteen now and are both attending the MEI (Mennonite Educational Institute). Julie is in Grade 10 and Tracey in Grade 8. Both girls have taken piano lessons and are singing in the young people's choir. Betty has worked part time for many years in Eaton's and is also involved in a ladies singing group called "Daysrping". These ladies have many singing engagements in our church as well as in other churches, but they love it. They sing to the glory of God.

OUR SILVER WEDDING

Beside our busy schedule in the Tabor Home, we had three weddings in our family in one year. Our Silver Anniversary was on December 21, 1966.

When I announced our silver wedding in the Tabor Home, all the residents said they wanted to attend. We were actually planning to have the service in English in our church. But the residents of the Home insisted that we should also have a program in the German language in the Home the evening before. So we agreed. Some people from outside the Home also came when they heard that we were having a German service.

The ladies on the staff had prepared some songs and some older folks recited poetry. One older man even sang a solo. Br. Jakob Dueck delivered a fitting message in German. I gave a testimony of how the Lord had seen fit to bring Katie and me together and also about part of our life's work. When the program was over, two of the staff left the room and came back, wheeling a three foot tree into the chapel. This tree was decorated with new silver dollars. "What a surprise it was!" Besides the money, different

presents were handed out to us from the old people. This humbled us very much as we realized their love and appreciation for us. Now everyone was satisfied and wished us good health and asked us to promise to stay with them until they died.

The next day, Sunday, we celebrated in our church in the afternoon. We had a full house. We had invited a quartet, Frank Janzen, Mrs. J. Unruh and the John Klassen's from East Aldergrove Church to sing several beautiful songs. Our Renetta played the piano and Betty and her cousin, Victor Friesen sang "The Lord my Shepherd is".

Rev. Henry Born, whom I had learned to know in Headingly Jail, led in the invocation. My nephew, Rev. Jacob H. Friesen had the message. Our new pastor, Rev. J. H. Quiring made the closing remarks, after which I shared about part of our life together. Later everyone was invited to the lower auditorium for a meal.

All in all it was a blessed day. We gave glory to God for what he had done in the previous twenty-five years of our life together.

RENETTA'S TURN TO MARRY

Having grown up in a Christian home, where love prevailed, and with her close sister Betty happily married, Renetta decided to follow suit. She had learned to know Dennis Neumann when his family moved to B.C. Dennis' father, David H. Neumann, came to teach at MEI and was later the principal there. It must have been love at first sight for Dennis and Renetta, because neither one ever courted anyone else. After highschool, Dennis attended Simon Fraser University and became an elementary school teacher. Renetta finished her piano teaching degree and was teaching privately at home and also group piano in the Burnaby schools.

Dennis had the courage to come and see us privately, asking for permission to marry Renetta. I am sure he knew there would be no problem, but that was, and still is the custom today. After their engagement on December 18, 1966, they planned their wedding. They were married on March 25, 1967 in the Bakerview M.B. Church.

After teaching for a few years, Dennis decided to return to Simon Fraser University to complete his B.A. in Commerce. Right after graduation, Dennis and Renetta took an assignment with the Mennonite Central Committee, which took them halfway around the world to Nepal, where Dennis held various positions in the Butwal Technical Institute. He was first involved in selling the products made at the school to government and business agencies. In his last year, he became the assistant director of the Institute, acting in the capacity of personnell director of some two hundred persons. Meanwhile, Renetta worked part time as a hostess in the guesthouse. Their daughter Kristal was born on August 1, 1970 in Abbotsford, B.C. and was only a year and a half when they left for Nepal.

On July 20, 1972, their son Shawn came to join the family. He was born in an old Rana (ruling class) palace in Kathmandu, Nepal. It wasn't until a few weeks after he was born that we found out his name meant "gift of God", but it is appropriate. He had a normal birth, but his umbilical cord came untied shortly after he was born, and no nurses had checked him for several hours. When they did check him six hours after his birth, he had almost bled to death. They had to rush for oxygen to put him into an oxygen tent in case of brain damage from lack of blood. Then they tried to prick him to find his blood type, but it was very difficult to get any blood from him since he had lost so much. Finally they found out his blood type, but they had a problem, since there was no blood bank in the country. There was no time to call a donor to donate blood, so after some discussion, one of the Nepali nurses remembered that they had done surgery on a westerner the day before and that some blood had been left over from the surgery. They ran to the basement to check, opened the fridge, and found exactly one bottle of blood, exactly his blood type. What a miracle! He could not get blood from Dennis or Renetta since he is type "O" which can give blood to anyone but can only receive his type. Truly, his life is a "gift of God".

In 1978, Shawn had a very special Christmas gift for his grandfather Friesen. He legally added "Friesen" to his name because he happens to be the only male offspring in our family. "Thanks, Shawn."

The Neumann's live on a five acre farm about twelve miles from Clearbrook. They have two horses and a dog. Dennis is in business as a land developer and Renetta does all his office work as well as computerized bookkeeping for small businesses. She is also busy looking after the family affairs. She plays the organ in church and also plays the piano for the ladies group, Dayspring.

God has blessed us with a lovely family and four grandchildren. We trust and pray that they will grow up and live to the honor and glory of God.



Our family: Left to right, Dennis Neumanns and Jim Fals.

MY ENDEAVOR TO LEARN OIL PAINTING AT 64

It was in October 1971 that I noticed an ad in the MSA News saying, "Oil painting lessons" by Naomi Charlton. This caught my attention. I new that if I would live to an old age, I would not want to be idle. So I turned to my Katie and said, "Would you mind if I took up oil painting?" She said, "You never mentioned it in all of our married life. What makes you

say this?" I said, "I see so many older men who have nothing to do except walk the street or sit and drink coffee. I can't see myself doing that. I think I could learn to paint oil paintings." Katie said, "I don't mind, go ahead."

I called my friend, Peter Boldt. Since he had been a house painter, I thought he might be interested in oil painting too. He agreed and so we went and made arrangements to take ten lessons. The teacher gave us a list of materials we needed, like paints, brushes, pencils, easels, etc. There were about ten students in the class.

Even though I didn't particularly like her way of teaching or her paintings, it gave me a start. These lessons awakened deep within me an interest in oil painting. The lessons lasted until Christmas. After they were done I looked for another teacher.

In 1972 we went to the PNE in Vancouver. When we walked into the art gallery, I saw a lady painting on a platform. Anyone could sit and watch her paint. It was fascinating. I watched her until she was ready for a break and then I went up to her and asked her whether she had a studio for giving lessons. She said that was her reason for being at the PNE, to solicit new students for the year. (Her name was Thelma Stobbie from Burnaby). I immediately signed up to be one of her students.

That year on my days off, I drove into Burnaby for the thirteen lessons. The third year I took twenty-three lessons from her teacher, W. Alexander, in Aldergrove. Everytime I took a lesson, I brought a painting that I had done home with me.

During my three weeks of holidays in 1974 I built a 15 x 36 foot addition to our house for a workshop. Here I had all the room I needed for painting and also for my gallery displays. For several years I was a member of the Abbotsford Pallete Club, to give me inspiration in painting and also to help market my paintings. During those years, I only sold one painting.

After that I went on my own. I put an ad in our local paper, the MSA News, with a picture of myself, holding my easel and painting a landscape. This ad announced my first art show, at 31961 Sunrise Crescent, Clearbrook. My friend Abe Goerz, also an

artist, and I had at least one hundred paintings displayed. I sold ten paintings ranging in price from \$40.00 to \$295.00. I sold a total of \$1,265.00 worth of paintings. This was very encouraging and also rewarding. Since that time I have become known as an artist and continue to sell paintings every year.

In 1982 we sold our home and moved into a condominium in Clearbrook. We decided that I should retire from my reflexology profession and we should have more time for each other in our latter years. In 1984 I spent nearly all the year painting in my den, which I also use for my study and library. I displayed my paintings at four arts and crafts shows and sold enough paintings to make a five week trip to Germany with my wife Katie.

NEWS FROM OUR RELATIVES IN GERMANY

In early spring of 1979, I was told by a friend who had just returned from a visit to Germany, that I had a few cousins in Neuwied, Germany. They happened to be neighbours many years ago in Russia, so he had visited them for eleven days. Now these relatives had sent greetings to me and wished that I would write a letter to them. We had never seen each other.

While we were in Russia, they had lived in the Ukraine, and we had lived in Siberia. We left for Canada in 1926. They, together with a large group, left their homes in 1929 and went to Moscow with plans to come to Canada. But after a few months in Moscow, they were shipped back in boxcars to where they had come from.

For many years they had to go through hard times, of starvation and persecution. In 1937 all men had been taken at night and had been sent away. Most of them had disappeared.

During the Second World War the Germans had overtaken the Ukraine. They gave our people better living conditions and freedom of religion. But when the Russian army took over their lost territory, the Germans had to withdraw, but they took the Mennonite settlers along with them to Germany and these Mennonites were given German citizenship. Among these were my relatives.

Sad to say, their freedom did not last very long.

When the Russians marched into Germany, our people were captured and sent back to Russia in boxcars again. They were told that they would be sent back to their village, but instead, they were shipped to Siberia. There they were unloaded in the winter, in an open place with no houses or villages in sight. Here they had to build their own log cabins in the forests. They had to cut trees for lumber for the government and they had very little food. Many didn't survive. They died from over exertion and starvation.

Women and also children in their teens had to work. Some of our relatives had survived these hard times, and after the war, were able to move away to Frunzie in Turkistan.

Here they had a little more freedom and better living conditions. They joined the Baptist Church which was registered with the government, and together they built a church for a thousand people. A man by the name of Victor Blanke, who had married into our Friesen clan (his wife Helen is the daughter of my first cousin), was the architect and builder of this church. After working their eight hour shift, men, women and young people came to help build this church.

Here they fellowshiped with believers for a number of years. The men worked in the mines and also in the building trades. Each family had a half acre of land for a house, and for a barn. They had one cow, one pig, some chickens and ducks. They also had gardens to grow vegetables for their own needs. Yet deep within, they had a desire to go to a land of freedom.

Since they had been given German citizenship while in Germany during the war, they now had the privilege of going back to Germany. One after another, families went to Germany. Since Germany had lost the war they were indebted to Russia. In this way the German government paid back its debt to Russia. Every family that came back to Germany was re-imbursed for the house they had lost during the war. They also had their trip to Germany paid for, plus they were also paid for all the hours they had worked in Russia. When they arrived in Germany, they got free board and room for a few months, as well as eight months of schooling to learn the German language and to become familiar with their new land.

All this financial help gave them a good start in Germany. They also could learn a trade of their choice which the Government would pay for. With this money they could rent their living quarters, buy all the needed furniture and also buy a car. Most of our relatives came to Germany in 1977.

After a few months of excited correspondence with my cousins, we decided to go to Germany to visit them. When my wife Katie went to see her doctor, he found that her heart condition would not allow her to go. So we had to postpone our plans. We knew we could trust our doctor Giesbrecht to do his best to help her with medicine. Sure enough, when Katie went to see him again in early 1980, he said she could go, but she should be careful.

In May 1980 we went to see our relatives for the first time. What a meeting it was! We all felt as if we belonged together. There was a oneness in spirit and in blood. I found that they were real Friesens. I could tell they had the same upbringing as I had had in my home.

There were four of my cousins with their families, from my father's side and two cousins from my mother's side.

The Friesen reunion took place at my cousins, Mrs. Anna Berg, in Espelkamp. Nearly all those who had married into the Friesen clan were there. We sang, gave testimonies of God's leading in our lives and prayed together. We gave God the glory for this privilege of meeting for the first time. We found that everyone was very grateful for being in the land of freedom, where they could worship God undisturbed. Everyone was working and making a good living.

We were in Europe for four weeks. During this time we also visited Austria and Switzerland by train.

The Friesens we visited were two cousins, daughters of my Uncle Abram, and two daughters of Uncle Bernhard. They were all widows with their families. We all knew that we also had an uncle Peter, my father's oldest brother, but none of us knew their whereabouts.

KATIE'S OPEN HEART SURGERY

Katie did very well in Germany. She managed to

do everything except climb hills. When we came home from Germany we felt that the trip had really been worth while. To see and get to know my blood relatives was a special experience for both of us. We had also taken my cousin Mary Janzen with us. Both Katie and Mary were very well received as relatives. We were all treated royally.

After we had been home awhile, Katie's heart condition worsened and she was advised to see a heart specialist, Dr. Art Friesen (Katie's nephew who had been my bricklaying helper while he was in high school). The heart scan he did showed that there were four blockages and if she wanted to live a normal life, she would need open heart surgery.

She was referred to Dr. Monroe for the operation. We both went to see him and he explained all the details of the surgery to us and told us to think it over and let him know if she wanted to go through with it.

My dear Katie is one who never lingers long in making decisions. The next day she phoned the office for an appointment for the operation.

Two weeks later, on September 21, 1981, exactly on her 71st birthday, she had her operation. Our two daughters, Betty and Renetta and I went to the Vancouver General Hospital in the morning and in quietness prayed for the doctors and nurses, and also for good news from the specialist.

After five hours of operation, Dr. Monroe came to see us in the waiting room. He brought us the good news that everything had gone well and that we could expect to have her home in about ten to twelve days. He also permitted us to go and see her in the recovery room. But oh, what a sight! Oxygen mask, tubes in the throat and nose, intravenous in the hands! She was connected to so many different machines and gadgets. I touched her face and hands and they were ice cold. I tried to talk to her, but there was no response. Later on she told me that she had realized that we were there. She recovered quickly and on the eleventh day I could take her home. We thanked God that he had given her back to us once more. "Praise His Name."



Our relatives in Germany, 1984.

GOD'S LEADING IN FINDING MY LAST RELATIVES

In July 1982, we were told of a Rev. Hamm from Germany who was giving a report in the Clearbrook M.B. Church about the underground churches in Russia, since he had come from Russia himself. Katie and I decided to go and listen. When the meeting was over, I walked into the foyer and saw two strange men standing there. A voice inside me said, "Go and talk to them." As I reached out my hand to greet the younger man, he said, "Friesen is my name." I said, "My name is also Friesen." Then I said, "The man next to you must be your brother." "Yes," he said, "my brother Peter."

"Where do you come from?"

"From the Krimea."

"What village?"

"Anovka."

"That's where my father was born," I replied. My last question was, "What was your father's name?"

"Peter."

I said, "Men, then we are cousins!"

Then we embraced each other and he started singing a Thanksgiving song. I joined him heartily. Now I had found my last and much longed for relatives. (The reason these two men had come to Canada was to visit their Uncle Henry Regehr, whom I knew very well.) When Peter and John Friesen came to visit us the next day we found out that we were not actually cousins, but that their father was my first cousin. He was the oldest son of my oldest Uncle Peter, a brother to my father.

As we talked, they told me that they had moved to Germany in 1979. I asked them if they had met with our other relatives in Germany and they said they had not. Wherever they had moved in Russia and now in Germany, they had asked about relatives, but had not found any.

Now I could give them all the addresses and phone numbers of all the Friesen's in Germany. When they got home, the first thing they did was call them. What a joy it was for all of them to know that in God's providence he brought us all together in a most unusual way.

After they went back to Germany, we kept the mail man busy. Letters went back and forth between all the relatives. Upon their invitation, we went back to Germany in 1984 for a five week visit. They had planned a Friesen reunion in Neuwied, had rented a special building with a kitchen and dining hall and we gathered there for two days of celebration. We filled the building and a few families had not even been able to come because of illness.

We had a regular Thanksgiving service with group singing, preaching and testimonies of what God had done in and through our lives. I don't know how many times I have thanked my God for letting me find my roots and my relatives.

Our relatives had planned their holidays so that when we came to visit them they would be free to visit with us. We really learned to know, love and appreciate our loved ones. They had gone through deep waters and many hard times. Yet they had not turned bitter towards God, but rather they were drawn closer to the Lord.



Wedding in Germany.

While we were in Germany I was asked to preach in several churches as well as at the wedding of one of my relatives. I will describe the wedding we attended.

The church held approximately 350 people and it was full. The pulpit stood in the centre at the front of the church. Looking from the audience, the choir was seated to the right and the bridal couple together with the best man and bridesmaid sat on the left hand side of the pulpit.

Behind the couple was a large 8x8 foot painting. It was a nature scene with a bluish background. It also had a larger than life-size angel in it, standing behind the couple, with hands outstretched, as if to bless this young couple.

The bride was dressed in a beautiful long white dress. She wore a wreath on top of her head and a long veil. In her hands she held a bouquet of roses. The wedding started at ten o'clock on Saturday morning.

There was an invocation, welcome, a short message and a song by the choir. This was followed by a second and main speaker, and another song by the choir. The pastor of the church then stood in front of the couple and gave a message directed to them, which was followed by the marriage ceremony and another song by the choir. After this the parents of the couple came to greet them and welcomed them into

their families. A hymn by the congregation closed the service.

By this time it was noon and everyone was invited to the dining room for a meal. We have been to many weddings, but never have we seen such a variety of food served. The tables were filled with different kinds of meats, potatoe salads, other salads, cookies, cakes, buns and squares.

At two o'clock in the afternoon the couple again took their place in the front of the church for another program. There was a song by the choir, a message by a young preacher, another song by the choir and then several people recited poems. This was followed by music with different instruments, another message by the brother of the groom and another song by the choir. After this service, all those who had brought gifts lined up along the aisle and brought them to the couple at the front of the church.

It was their custom to invite all the people for another meal after the afternoon ceremonies. When the ceremonies and meals were over, the bridal couple went into a large room where anyone could come and take pictures, either of the couple alone or with family members. It was a very interesting and full day for us.

Our people really enjoy the freedom of religion in Germany. We were told that those who had come from Russia in the last ten years had built twenty-two Baptist Brethren Churches. Some churches were built new. Others were old factories that they remodelled into fabulous church buildings. Their membership ranged from 200 to 1000 members per church. They had two services on Sunday (morning and evening) as well as a Wednesday night Bible Study and Prayer meeting. Our hearts were blessed as we fellowshiped with those dear people.

During our five weeks in Germany, we were in forty-two homes of relatives. We paid them each a visit; some longer and some shorter. Now we know where they are, how they live and how they worship God.

We also found that all those that could and wanted to work, had a place where they could earn their living. We all can adjust to better times and living conditions, and these people are no exception.

CONCLUSION

Recently my wife and I attended a Golden Wedding Anniversary. Among other things, the minister who delivered the message said that he appreciated the fact that if the groom had something to say, he would "tell it as it is."

I have tried to do just that in my autobiography. I am sure there have been times in my life, when I look back, that I wish had never happened, and of which I am now ashamed.

I think I have given the reader the impression that I was born in sin, like every human being, and that if we choose our own way, we err and go astray and can make life miserable for ourselves and for others. But I think I have also left the impression that if we give our life completely to God, and surrender to His will, He can use us.

I have not received any degree in education, but in spite of this, the Lord has seen fit to use me to "fill the gap" in His Kingdom and in society. I still want to be used of God as long as He gives me strength.

As I look back upon all the wonderful experiences in my life and upon the ways in which God has led in my life, giving me a full life and ministry, as well as blessing me with allowing me to find my last relatives, I see that His hand has truly been upon my life. In looking to the future, I am assured that the "Best is Yet to Come," when I will be received home to glory to meet my Saviour face to face, and also be reunited with my many loved ones who have gone before.

Soon our life here on earth will be finished. Then we will all stand before the Lord Jesus Christ to receive our reward for what we have done in His name with the talents He has given us. Therefore, let us not waste our time and talents, but rather let's be faithful to Him who has called us and has given Himself for us.

The word of this little poem expresses these thoughts well.

A little while, and we shall be
Where sin can never dwell;
A little while and we shall live
Where songs of triumph swell.

A little while and we shall hear
Our Saviour's whisper, "Come!"
And we shall ever dwell with Him
In our eternal home.

A little while and we shall see
Our Saviour face to face,
And we shall sing, through endless days,
The wonders of His grace.

There we will all praise God with joy unspeakable
and full of glory! My reader, will you be there too?
You can be if you accept Jesus Christ as your personal
Saviour.

I hope to meet you in glory.



Myrtle holding Renetta, 1946.



Renatta as baby.



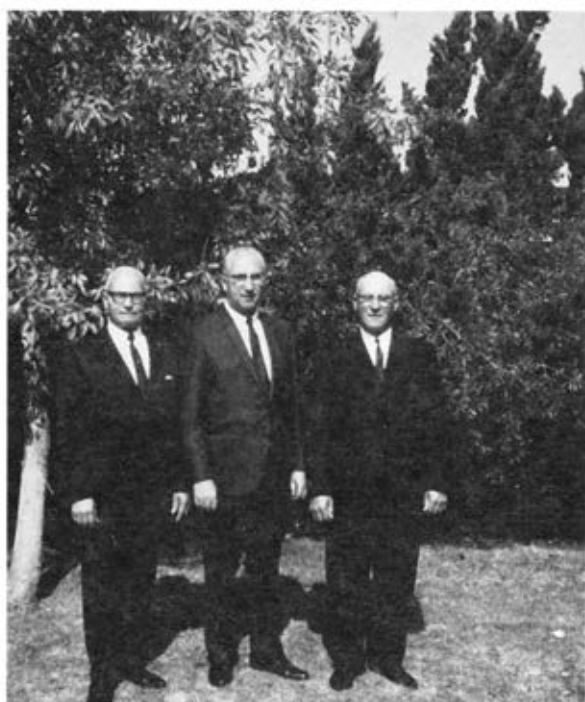
Home rented for \$25 a month, 1949.



Our girls off to school.



Brother Dietrech's male choir in 1942.



Three brothers, Abe, Peter and Dietrech in 1967.



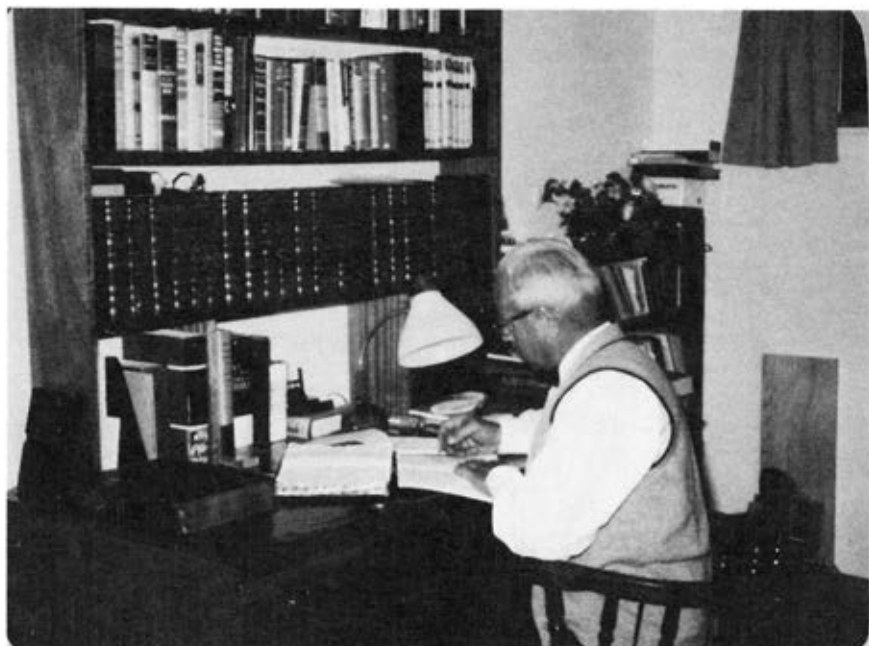
Betty and Jim's wedding, March, 1967.



Renetta and Dennis' wedding, March, 1967.



The instigators of the Tabor Home, Mrs. Schmoor and Mr. J. Schmidt.



Abe Friesen as administrator, 1961.



Abe, the artist.



Menno Simons monument, taken 1984.



Abe doing research and writing the book, 1985.



Our home from 1971 to 1982.



Our Present home, Suite 202, Evergreen Village, Clearbrook, B.C.



"Old Settlers" painting by Abe Friesen.



Our family: Katie, Renatta, Elizabeth, and Abe.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I remember the author as a favorite uncle after whom I was named. As a youngster I looked forward with joyous anticipation to his many visits to my parents' farm in Oak Bluff, Manitoba. After he married, these visits became fewer and of shorter duration however, a consequence some of us did not care for. Nonetheless, even though Uncle Abe and Aunt Katie moved to British Columbia in the late 1940's, the bonds then established have not only remained strong over the years, they have grown much stronger. And now that he has become the patriarch of the clan, older members of his family having passed on, we are delighted to see him publish his memoirs. We know that not only members of his larger family, all of whom love him unreservedly, will welcome these memoirs, but all who know and love him - and everyone who has ever met him falls into this category, he assures me! - will be eager to read them.

In Deuteronomy 11: 18-20 God tells the children of Israel to "lay up these words in your heart and in your soul." He tells them to "teach them to your children," and to speak of them constantly. And finally He tells them to "write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates." My uncle's memoirs are the result of his laying up the words of God in his heart and soul. Throughout his life, as far as I can remember, he has taught them to his children and anyone else willing to listen. In these memoirs he has written the words God put in his heart and soul on the door posts and gate for all to see. Those of us who are privileged to belong to his larger family are grateful. We Mennonites need more such memoirs to add to our collective understanding of how God has worked in our midst.

Abraham Friesen
Santa Barbara, California